Scrambling Guide: Experts share their tips

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The Great Outdoors

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24-PAGE SPECIAL

PUB WALKS *with bite*

PEAK DISTRICT Autumn on Kinder Scout

PEMBROKESHIRE Perfect pints in the Preselis

LAKE DISTRICT Scramble Sour Milk Gill

SCOTLAND Backpack the Black Mount

+

11 MAPPED ROUTES

Pages 90–110

PLUS

BIKERS *vs* WALKERS

PATAGONIA *Ice cap adventure*

GEAR

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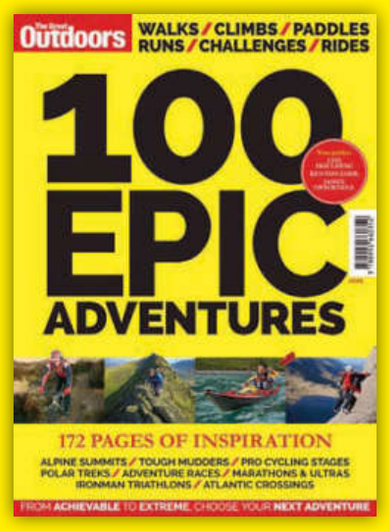
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Thawing out



One of my favourite parts of a long day out in the hills is what comes afterwards – not the aching legs when I climb the stairs the following morning (if anyone has any good recommendations for avoiding those, I'd love to hear them) but the combination of post-exercise euphoria and the satisfaction of achievement that you get immediately after a big walk. Combine that with a drink in a great walkers' boozer in the company of good friends and you've got yourself the perfect autumn evening.

We recently sent out four of our regular contributors to find some pub walks with a twist – not your standard hill-plus-a-pint, but something a bit more interesting: routes that were long or scrambly or involved a summit sleep-out. We've called them *pub walks with bite*, in honour of the Great British bar meal. And we've combined them with recommendations for some other brilliant pub walks in the Lake District, Peak District, Scotland and Wales.

On the subject of pubs, has your favourite been shortlisted in this year's Great Outdoors Awards? You can find out via the awards website at **www.tgomagazine.co.uk/awards**, where we'll be publishing the shortlists on 15 October, at which point you can also start voting. Best of luck to everyone who has been shortlisted. Cheers!
Emily

BRITAIN ON FOOT

Get in touch: @TGOMagazine
editorial@tgomagazine.co.uk

Cover photo: Dougie Cunningham

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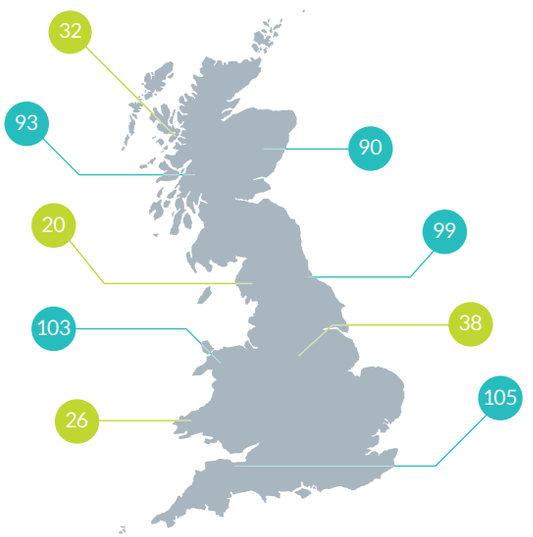
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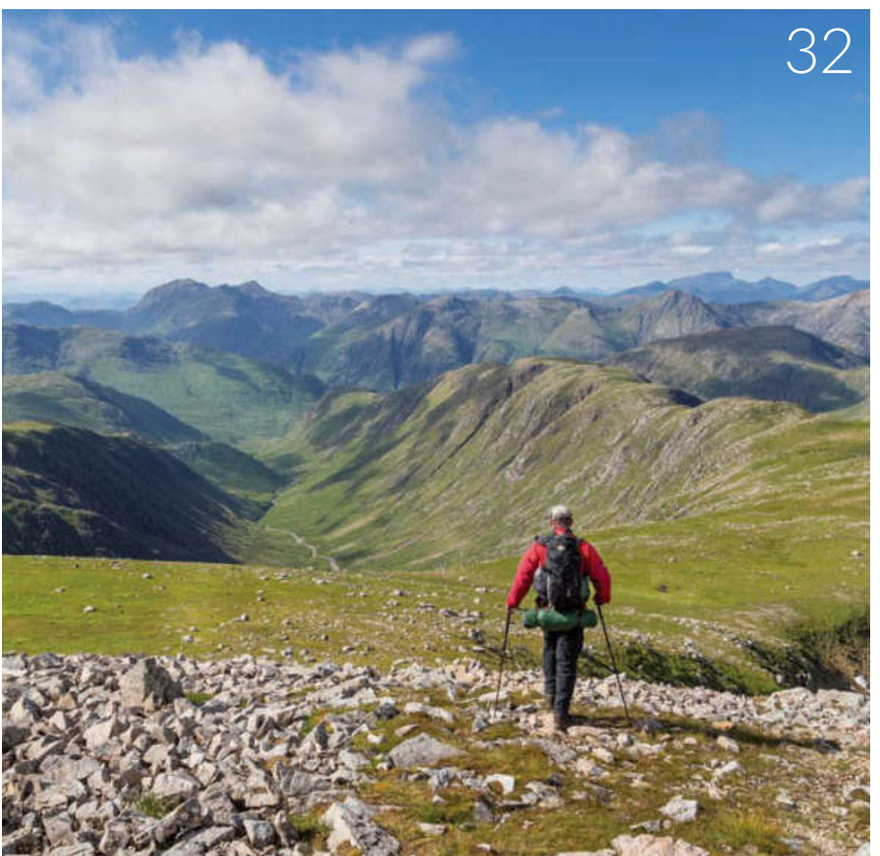
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Features: Sweet and low in the Trossachs, Ed Byrne on Blencathra

Routes: Wonderful walks for early winter

Gear: Cold weather baselayers and GPS devices

Skills: The Great Outdoors Guide to staying safe in the hills

Contributors and their **favourite pub walks**

Chiz Dakin

The author of our Patagonia feature (page 44), Chiz Dakin has just returned from the Julian Alps of Slovenia, a textbook example of limestone country. Her trek her from near Kranjska Gora in the north to Lake Bohinj in the south, staying in mountain huts. It was a challenging but rewarding experience, although she was glad of her scrambling skills and via ferrata kit in the north!
Favourite pub walk: "From Curbar, along White Edge to The Grouse, then through Longshaw to the Fox House. Return via Padley Gorge and River Derwent."



David Lintern

David has spent the back half of the summer in Snowdonia and Northumberland, taking photos and riding his bike. More recently, he managed a quick getaway to the Black Mount (see page 32) to remind himself of the glories of Scotland, before returning to Northumberland to pick up his first award from the Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild.
Favourite pub walk: "The zigzags scramble onto Bidean nam Bian (my first ever Munro) followed by an evening in the climbers' bar in the Clachaig Inn, Glen Coe."



Joly Braime

Joly has just got back from walking the Swedish Green Ribbon – 1,400km through the mountains of northern Scandinavia. He spent the previous summer hiking the Norwegian pilgrim trail, and now wonders whether he is developing an obsession with Nordic countries. Joly's home is in North Yorkshire, and he can regularly be found roaming the North York Moors.
Favourite pub walk: "Following George Stephenson's old railway line from Goathland to Grosmont, with a pint at the characterful Birch Hall Inn, in Beck Hole (see page 99)."









Jon Sparks

Multi-sports enthusiast Jon Sparks finds that walking and mountain biking often draw him to different areas or to discover different aspects of the same area (see page 52). Earlier this year a big trip to Scotland gave him a new perspective on Torridon, while he rates his ride from Camasunary to Sligachan on Skye as one of the best he's ever had.
Favourite Pub walk: "Any walk (or ride) that takes in the Hare and Hounds in Levens suits me – a meditative wander round Helsington Barrows with camera and tripod, perhaps."

Hanna Lindon

With a baby on the way at the beginning of 2016, Hanna has slowed down a tad recently– but she's still managed to squeeze in trips to Knoydart, Glen Coe and the Yorkshire Dales! The highlight of her summer was a walking holiday to Hardangerfjord in Norway. Next up is a trip to Snowdonia to squeeze in the Lech Ddu Spur before winter.
Favourite pub walk: "I had a fantastic (if damp) time gill scrambling around Seathwaite recently (see page 20), but my favourite remains the Aonach Eagach with a pint at the Clachaig."

Daniel Neilson

It's been a busy few months for Daniel, not least enjoying a new addition to the family. He recently made a visit to Torridon, where he was stunned by its wilderness but also eaten alive by midges, and has also been to the Peak District for a big walk (with a pub!) that you can read about on page 38. Alongside these trips he's been attempting, and mostly failing, to train for the Original Mountain Marathon.
Favourite pub walk: "The walk in this issue takes in my favourite parts of the Peak District, and the pub just over halfway around is rather good."

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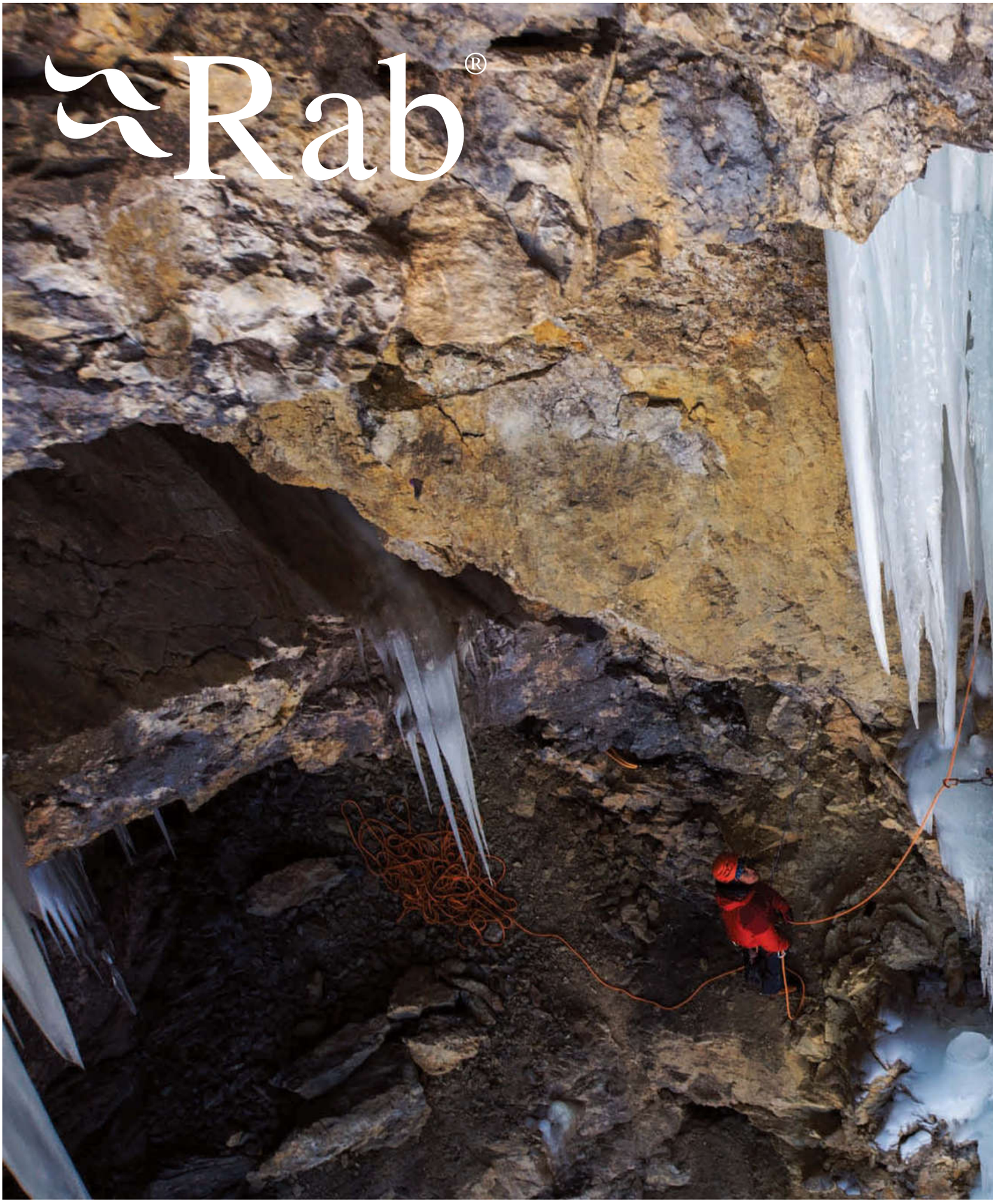
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Jeff Mercier joins the Flying Circus (M10 90°, 100m), the third of his trilogy of hard routes at Kandersteg – all climbed in a single day. Photo: Jon Griffith. © Equip Outdoor Technologies Uk Ltd.



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Kandersteg in Switzerland has long been a mecca for Alpine Climbers. In March 2015 Rab Athlete Jeff Mercier made an incredible link up of three hard classic routes - in a single day.
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Carnedd y Cribau, Snowdonia

"After spending the previous night on the Nantlle Ridge I wasn't feeling particularly adventurous and opted for an easy trundle up Carnedd y Cribau. Although in elevation terms it's unimpressive, the view across the Snowdon Horseshoe and over Llyn Gwynant is one of the best in Snowdonia. As night came the wind dropped off, a mist formed in the valley and a heavy dew settled on my tent. The moonlight and stars brought a hint of magic to the scene."

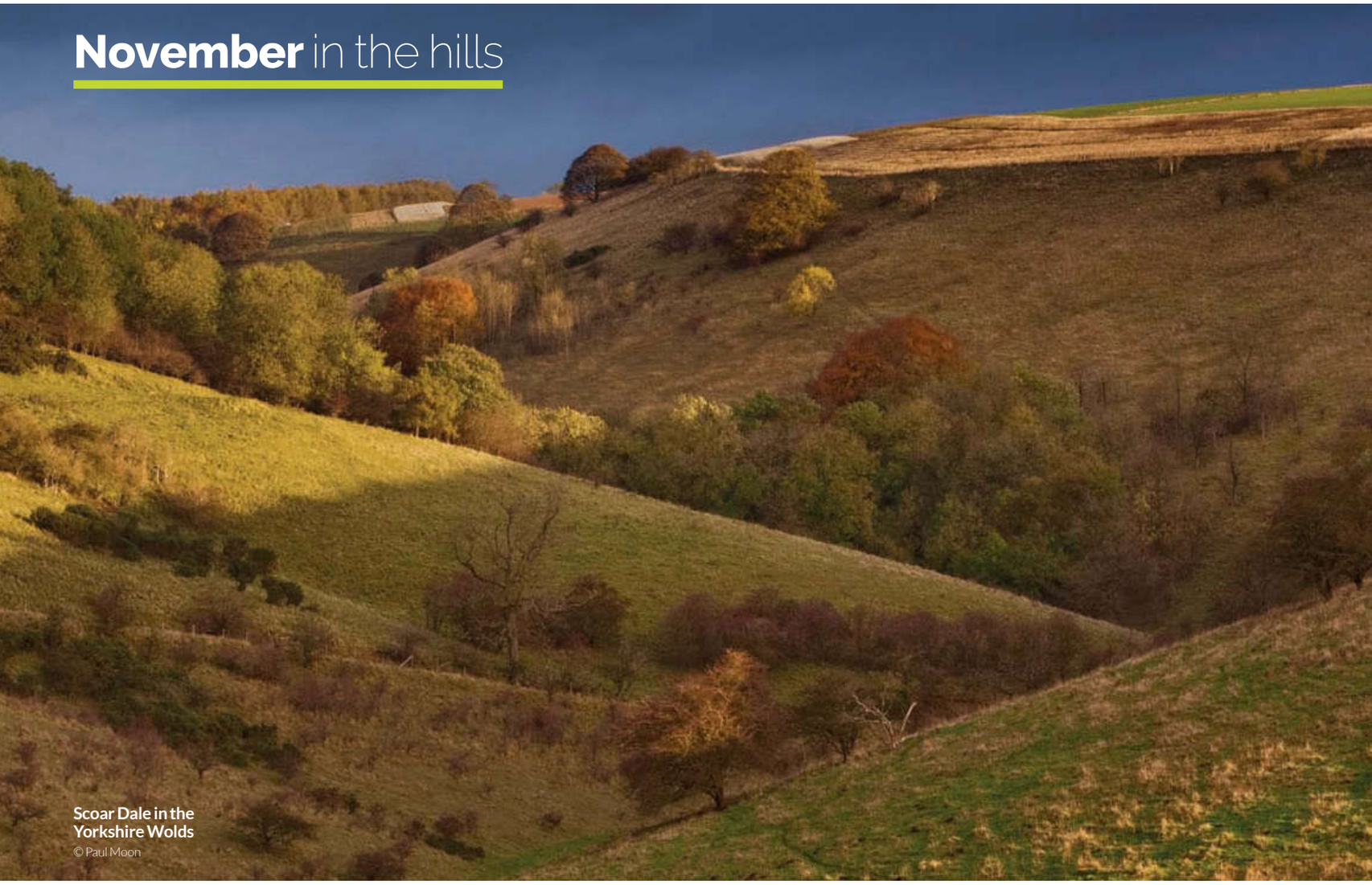
Photo by Alex Nail
alexnail.com



Almanac November

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November in the hills



Scoar Dale in the Yorkshire Wolds
© Paul Moon

The Yorkshire Gold Season

THERE'S MORE TO God's Own Country than the Three Peaks. Autumn is the perfect time of year to head east and visit the low hills of the Yorkshire Wolds. Catch the chalk downlands while they're at their atmospheric best: when early mornings reveal the mingled valleys pooled with mist and the gentle hills coated in frost, and while the patches of woodland turn ablaze with colour. An added bonus is that, in this notoriously soggy season, the chalk hills drain away water effortlessly – meaning little mud to contend with!

"We have rippled the earth with our desire to be here not there." These words by local poet John Wedgwood Clark can be found engraved on a bench along the Yorkshire Wolds Way. The 127km path is, of course, the best way of exploring this countryside. A National Trail since 1982, it runs between Hessle at the banks of the Humber Estuary and then finishes further north at Filey. It's a curved route that goes right through the heart of the Wolds as well as skirting some of the escarpment's edge. The highest point reached on the trail is only 215m (just outside Thixendale), so it's no walk through wilderness, however the Wolds are sparsely populated, meaning there's plenty of isolation and tranquillity to be found along the way.

At the end of September, the North York Moors National Park released a statement announcing the Yorkshire Wolds Way as the first National Trail to be completely stile-free; this is despite a 1996 survey having recorded it as having as many as 120. It beats the Thames Path to the title – which at the time of writing supposedly has one stile remaining!



Fridaythorpe

The best area to see the dry valleys that characterise the Yorkshire Wolds. They were created at the end of the last Ice Age, when fast-flowing streams carved out the land. Now the chalk hills drain any water straight into the valleys so that they run completely dry.

Londesborough Park

The Yorkshire Wolds Way passes right through the 16th Century estate of Londesborough Hall. It's filled with lime and oak trees that bring the parkland alive with colour at this time of year.



5 sites along the Yorkshire Wolds Way

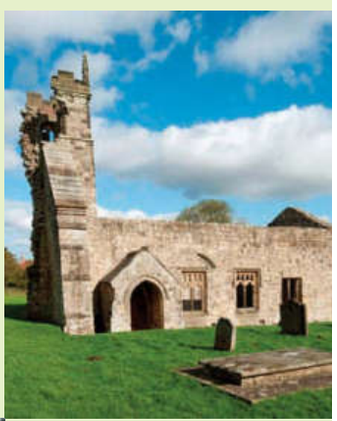


Thixendale

This land art called 'Waves and Time' imagines the ancient flow of ice and water that shaped the Wolds. The design, near the village of Thixendale, is just one of numerous art pieces along the National Trail, all part of a project called 'Wander – Art on the Yorkshire Wolds Way'.

Wharram Percy

This abandoned village is believed to be a product of the sweeping shift to sheep farming during the Tudor period, referred to by Thomas More in his 1516 satire, *Utopia*, as "sheep devouring men". Wharram Percy is one of the best preserved of thousands of villages that suffered a similar fate.



© English Heritage



© Yorkshire Wolds Way Partnership

Wintringham

There's plenty of woodland walking along the stretch of the Yorkshire Wolds Way near Wintringham. Malcolm Hodgson, the trail officer for the Way regards Settrington Woods as one of the finest to walk through in autumn.

Q&A Steve Backshall

THE WILDLIFE EXPERT and TV personality answers our questions following the release of a new memoir recalling his life of climbing…



Where does your climbing ambition come from? Is it a love of the activity itself or is it a means of finding rare wildlife?

"While I have found great wildlife climbing, it's certainly not my main reason to climb. In certain places, for instance the High Himalaya, there's not an enormous amount of wildlife. It's certainly not comparable with the rainforest or tropical coral reefs. For me it's about wilderness, it's about adventure, it's about challenge. It's about the possibility that you can all of a sudden be in a place that very few other people can reach. Even when you're somewhere that might otherwise seem fairly tame. You can be in Snowdonia and be surrounded by trekkers, families and Scout groups, but the second you start up a vertical rock face you can be in a whole other world that no one can follow into."

Where is your favourite climbing location in the UK?

"The rock climbing guidebook for Pembroke is so big you can hardly lift the thing. There are thousands and thousands of routes and climbing around the beautiful clear seas that you get down there is an absolute joy. I spend a lot of time there… and Gower as well."

Which has been your hardest climb?

"In the UK it was probably a winter climb of Point Five Gully on Ben Nevis. It was in extremely cold and windy conditions with spindrift avalanches hammering down on my head all day long. Hardest in the world was one I've just come back from in Venezuela. It was a first ascent of a huge sandstone 'tepui' (table-top mountain). The routes on that were extraordinarily hard. We were all glad to come back alive by the end of that"

If things go wrong are you happy to turn back?

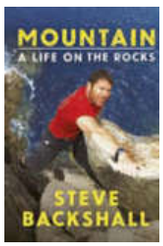
"Yes. When I was younger and less experienced it would bug me senseless. Now, I'm much more philosophical about it. I think probably the most essential facet you can have as someone that works in adventure is the ability to say: 'You know what, this is too dangerous, let's turn around and head for home.' The mountain will still be there next year."

In the book you mention an accident you had while climbing…

"I had a fall in Wales in 2007 that probably should've killed me. I broke my back in two places, destroyed my left ankle and have had 12 operations since to try and get myself back to full fitness. It's been a battle mentally and physically to try and get myself back to where I am now."

And finally, where do you stand on the rewilding argument?

"There have been some spectacular successes with rewilding in the UK. In my area the red kite has become what's probably our most conspicuous bird, and it is a majestic addition to our wildlife. Likewise with white-tailed eagles in Scotland. But personally, I think our money, time and effort should be put into maintaining what we have rather than spending huge amounts of money on bringing back animals – in some cases to a landscape that isn't really ready for them anymore. We have so little really wild land here in the UK and animals like wolves and lynx need vast areas to survive."



Mountain: A Life on the Rocks is available now (Orion, £18.99 hardback)











The Great Outdoors Awards 2015

Public voting begins as **TGO**'s judging team assesses the shortlisted gear entries

The 2015 Great Outdoors Awards take place at the start of the Kendal Mountain Festival in November. On 15 October voting will begin in the reader categories – check out the box to the right for details on how to place your votes. In the meantime, the panel of judges has narrowed down the gear entries to the shortlists below. The results will be announced online in November and in the magazine soon afterwards. Good luck to everyone who has made the shortlists!

CLOTHING

1. Bergans of Norway Storen Jacket
2. Berghaus Ramche Hyper HydrodownJacket
3. Black Diamond Deployment Hybrid Hoody
4. Fjällräven Keb Eco-Shell Jacket
5. Jöttnar Hymir Jacket
6. Rab Nebula Jacket
7. SmartWool Corbet 120 Jacket
8. The North Face FuseForm Dot Matrix Insulated Jacket

FOOTWEAR

1. Altberg Malham
2. Arc'teryx Acrux2 FL GTX Approach Shoe
3. Hoka One One Tor Ultra Hi WP
4. Mammut Ridge High GTX
5. Hanwag Belorado Mid Lady GTX

CAMPING

1. Cascade Designs Therm-a-Rest EvoLite
2. Jetboil MiniMo
3. LuminAID PackLite 16
4. MLD SoloMid + InnerNet
5. Nigor WickiUp 3
6. Nordisk Oscar Sleeping Bag
7. Rab Neutrino 800 Sleeping Bag
8. Terra Nova Solar Ultra 2 Tent
9. Hilleberg Enan Tent

EQUIPMENT

1. Lifesystems Emergency Strobe
2. Julbo Race/Trek Sunglasses With Zebra Lenses
3. Komperdell Stiletto
4. Osprey Atmos AG65
5. The North Face Modulator ABS

INNOVATION

1. Berghaus Baffin Island Jacket
2. Finisterre Waterproof Adventure Light
3. LifeStraw Mission
4. MLD eVent Soul Bivy
5. Nigor Laughing Owl
6. Polartec Power Wool
7. PrimaLoft Silver Insulation Active
8. Rab Paradox Pull-On

SUSTAINABILITY

1. Berghaus Eco Wovens range
2. Finisterre
3. Mountain Equipment Down Codex
4. Nikwax Down Wash Direct
5. Tundra Pure & Dry Sleeping Bags
6. Vaude

The Great Outdoors Awards 2015

Place your votes!

The nine categories nominated for and voted on by the public are:

- **Walkers' pub** of the year
- **Walkers' cafe** of the year
- **Campaign or campaigner** of the year
- **Outdoor personality** of the year
- **Outdoor book** of the year
- **Independent retailer** of the year
- **Chain retailer** of the year
- **Online retailer** of the year
- **Outdoor clothing or equipment brand** of the year

HEAD TO WWW.TGOMAGAZINE.CO.UK/AWARDS TO VOTE BY 15 NOVEMBER



Take up the Challenge!

Fancy backpacking across Scotland in 2016?

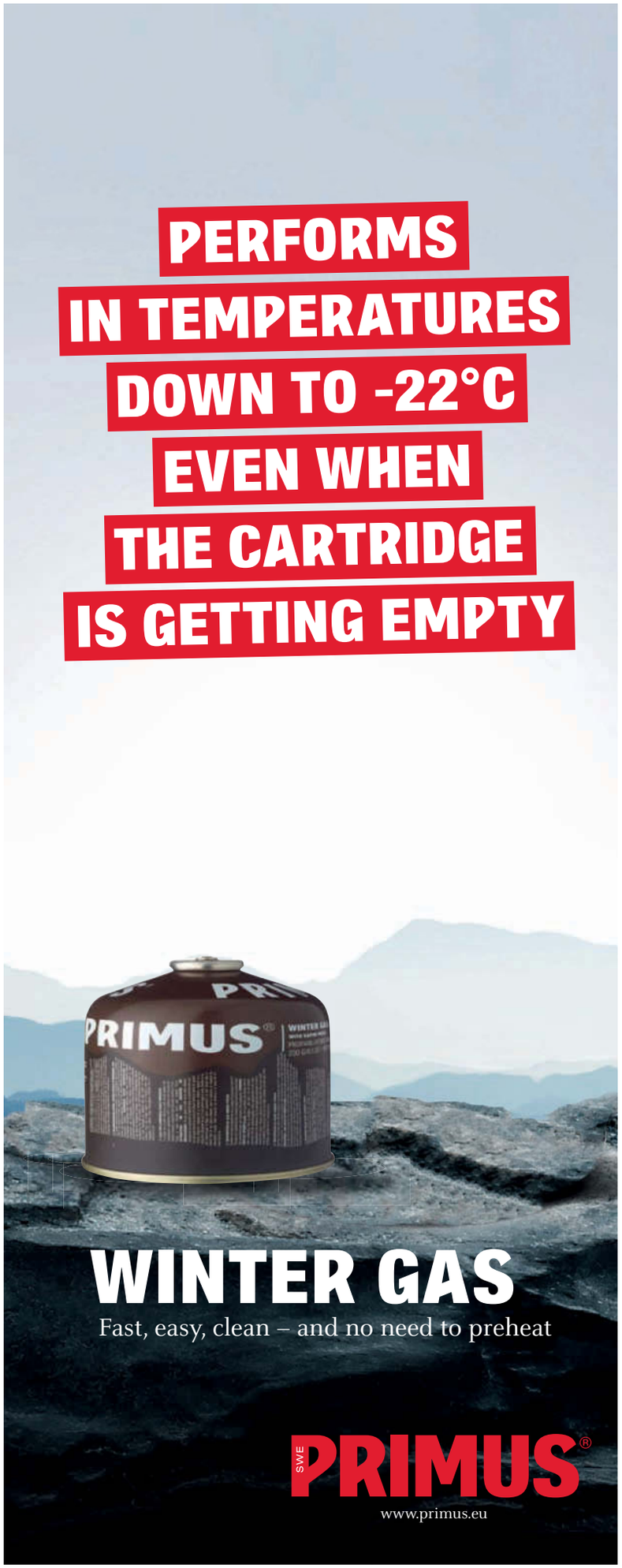


In last month's edition of *TGO* we announced the details of the 2016 Great Outdoors Challenge, which will run from 13-27 May.

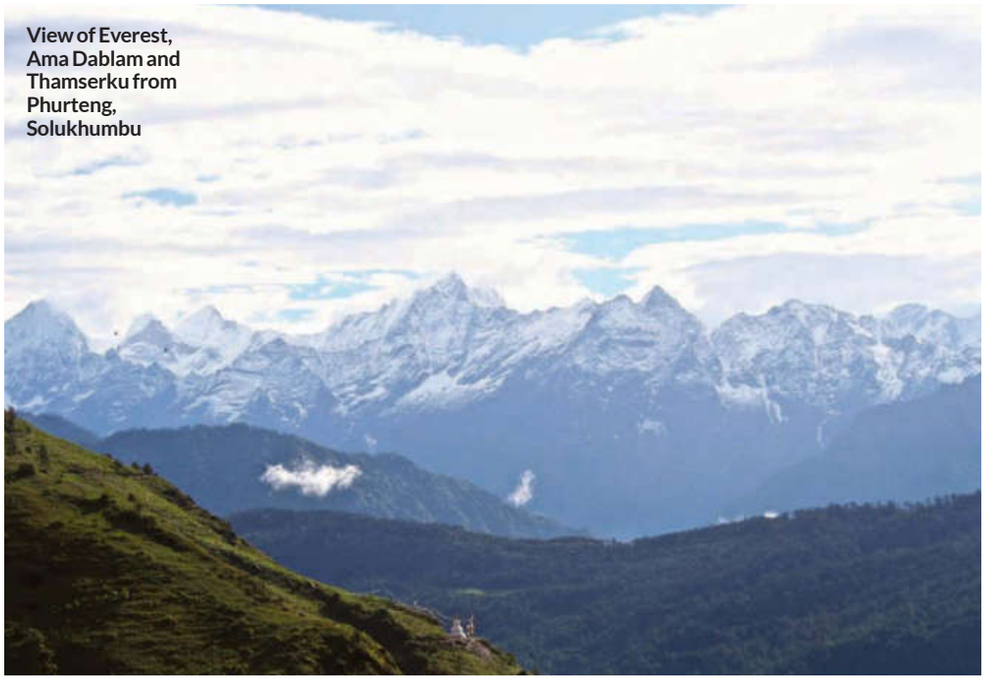
The Challenge is a very special and totally unique backpacking event, which has taken place annually since 1980. Every May, hundreds of passionate and enthusiastic long-distance walkers make their way from the west to the east coast of Scotland, each of them with the same endpoint in mind, but all following their own route. Many come back time and time again to enjoy the unique camaraderie of the Challenge.

If you would like to join *TGO*'s Chris Townsend and Will Renwick on next year's Challenge, check out our new website at **www.tgomagazine.co.uk/challenge**, and then turn to the back of this issue of the magazine, where you'll find your entry form. Good luck!





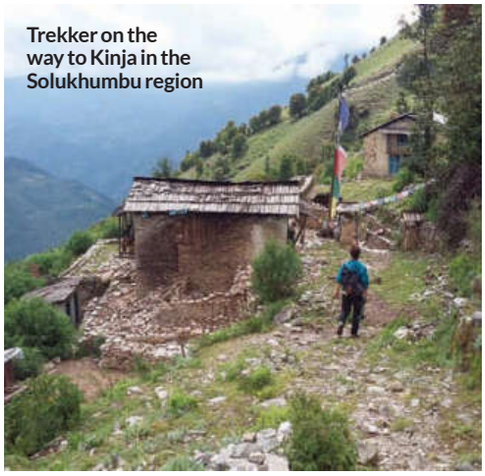
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View of Everest, Ama Dablam and Thamserku from Phurteng, Solukhumbu



Sherpa guesthouse ruins in Solukhumbu



Trekker on the way to Kinja in the Solukhumbu region

Aftershock

Autumn is a key trekking season in the Himalayas. But, as *Jessica Tradati* reports, the Nepalese tourism industry is still feeling the effect of April's earthquakes

ALMOST FIVE MONTHS have gone by since a 7.8 magnitude earthquake hit Nepal, killing over 8,800 people and destroying 500,000 homes. Besides the extensive structural damages and the scale of human loss, the country's worst disaster in 80 years badly affected the vital tourism sector. The National Planning Commission of the Government of Nepal estimates that the overall impact on the tourism industry will be a reduction in tourists' arrival of about 40% over the next 12 months, and a 20% reduction in the following 12 to 24 months. In May and June tourist numbers dropped by about 90% and, according to the Trekking Association of Nepal (TAN), 40,000 employees (guides, porters, cooks, etc.) involved in the trekking industry lost their jobs and were sent home.

"Two major trips that my clients booked before the earthquake have just been cancelled, that means that my staff is unemployed at the moment," says Norbu Sherpa, experienced mountain guide and cofounder of Wild Yak Expeditions. "It looks like foreign travel companies are not boosting Nepal travel packages as usual, and are diverting their clients to other destinations, forgetting that there are actually lots of places which were not affected by the quake, like Dolpo, Kanchanjunga, Mustang, and Annapurna."

The cost of recovering and rebuilding destinations and visitors' confidence stands at billions of Nepali rupees; according to the government's post-disaster needs assessment report, trails have sustained damages of about NPR 426.1 million (approx.£2.5m) and the country's overall reconstruction costs amount to $7bn (£4.5bn).

"Our efforts, now, need to target the global tourism market and convince potential visitors to come to Nepal, as well as provide assistance to affected rural and urban tourism entrepreneurs. In 2014, travels and tourism in Nepal directly supported 487,500 jobs, 3.5% of the total employment, and despite the overall estimated damages and losses, we remain optimistic that there'll be a turnaround in the medium to long term," says the Vice Chairman of the National Planning Commission Professor Dr. Govind Raj Pokharel.

The loss of income due to the dramatic post-earthquake drop of visitors is forcing many, employed in the tourism sector, to look for options abroad, particularly in the Arab Gulf countries: "Very good Sherpa guides and porters are now searching for jobs in Qatar or in the UAE. If they really depart, this will be a great loss for the tourism industry and the whole country," says Norbu Sherpa, who deeply believes that the government could play a pivotal role in supporting the tourism recovery.

On this note, the National Planning Commission, chaired by Sushil Koirala, Nepal's prime minister, has just developed a recovery strategy that calls for a Safe Trekking System, which consists of communication coverage throughout all areas and routes, a monitoring system of visitors and staff along a trail, more efficient rescue procedures and management, shelters and accommodation along each trail, businesses and infrastructure built and operating according to safety standards.

When and how exactly the plan will be implemented remains unclear; for now, what Nepal really needs is a joint long-lasting cooperation between the government, the media, the foreign and local trekking agencies, and the international organisations, to restore the country's image and guarantee reliable services.



Tamara set to be shown at the European Outdoor Film Tour

Outdoor Events

23 SEPTEMBER – 25 NOVEMBER

Everest the Hard Way

It was 40 years ago this autumn that Doug Scott and Dougal Haston reached the top of Everest having climbed it by its seemingly unconquerable South West Face. To mark the anniversary Doug will be visiting venues throughout the country, telling the story of their remarkable feat.

canepal.org.uk/doug-scott-lectures/

17 OCTOBER – 1 NOVEMBER

New Forest Walking Festival

The National Park Authority and its partners will be holding themed walks throughout the Forest, including a tour of its ancient trees, an exploration of its wildlife and even guided walks with alpaca. Most of the walks are charged but discount is given to those who arrive by public transport.

newforestnpa.gov.uk

31 OCTOBER – 12 NOVEMBER

European Outdoor Film Tour

More than 14 countries and 300 venues will be visited by this film tour, now in its 15th season. For its UK leg it will be stopping at cities including London, Bristol and Glasgow to showcase outdoor films including *Unbranded*, *Tamara* and *1 h 46*, a documentary following speed climber Dani Arnold on his attempt at the Matterhorn. Tickets cost £13.50 and booking is necessary.

eoft.eu

4 NOVEMBER

Eden Fell Care Day

Friends of the Lake District are calling on volunteers to help maintain the local landscape for a day. Various activities are available, including woodland management and step-cutting. Places are limited and offered on a first come, first served basis.

friendsofthelakedistrict.org.uk

6-8 NOVEMBER

Mountain Arts Festival: Community Action Nepal

Rheged Centre near Kendal will be hosting presentations, discussions and workshops led by distinguished painters, artists, writers and musicians to celebrate mountains and mountain people. The event, in association with the Royal Geographical Society, will be raising funds for Community Action Nepal. Tickets prices vary and booking is required.

rheged.com

21-22 NOVEMBER

Real Ale Ramble

Held annually in conjunction with the 10-day Mid Wales Beer Festival. The ramble begins from Llanwrtyd Wells Town Square and follows any of three waymarked routes (6, 9 or 14km) with free ales available at checkpoints. The walks return to town for celebrations in local pubs. Entry fee payable.

green-events.co.uk





Seceda/Geislergruppe - Gruppo delle Odle
(Val Gardena)
Pic: Ray Demski


SALEWA
salewa.com

• PUB WALKS WITH BITE •



PEMBROKESHIRE
PAGE 26



HIGHLANDS
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PEAK DISTRICT
PAGE 38

THE GREAT
OUTDOORS

CLAMBERING THE
CASCADES
SOUR MILK GILL

A GENUINE ADVENTURE
IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

JB WALKS
No.1
WITH BITE



STEPPING STONES, WATERFALLS, SUMMITS, AND A PUB WHERE YOU CAN DRY YOUR SOCKS OVER A ROARING FIRE… COULD THIS BE THE RECIPE FOR THE PERFECT AUTUMNAL DAY OUT? **HANNA LINDON** HEADS TO SOUR MILK GILL TO FIND OUT

PHOTOGRAPHY: OLI PRINCE

Emblem inspired by the heritage
of Jennings Cocker Hoop

PUB WALKS No.1 WITH BITE

WE'D ONLY LEFT THE ROAD 10 minutes ago, but already we were firmly established as Seathwaite's premier tourist attraction. Groups of bemused campers gathered outside their tents at the base of Sour Milk Gill to watch our slow progress uphill. Fingers pointed, kids laughed, a guy in an indecently small Mickey Mouse towel paused on his way back from the shower to stare up at us with sagging jaw. We were too far away to hear the enquiry rippling around this cluster of fascinated observers, but we knew what they were saying all right:

"Why are those total numpties walking up the river when there's a perfectly good path right next door?"

It was the same question my husband Guy had been asking ever since I suggested trying a gill scramble.

"Well, but won't we get wet?"

"Yes, but that's kind of the point. It's supposed to be fun."

"Right, yeah, I get it, but couldn't we just do a normal, dry scramble? You know, where we won't have to spend the rest of the day with soggy feet? That would be fun too."

"No, we couldn't," I responded tersely. "Look, remember when you were a kid and the only way your parents could get you on a walk was to tell you there'd be waterfalls and stepping stones along the way? This is like that – only the grown-up version."

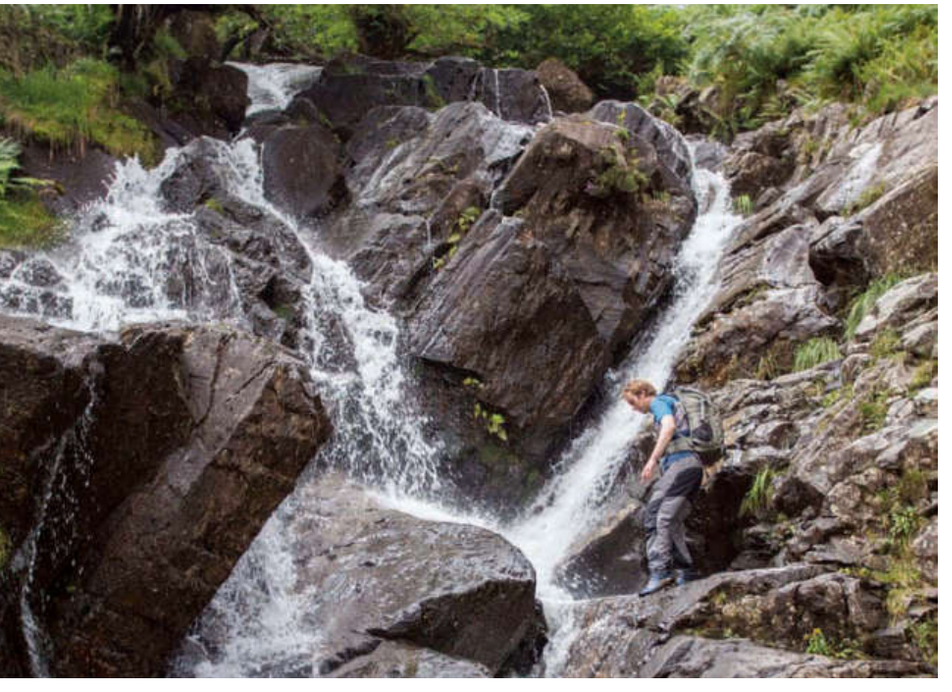
Truth be told, I wasn't entirely convinced by my own arguments. I'd only ever been gill scrambling once before, and that was nothing but an after-thought: a pleasant tramp through a virtually flat streambed on the way back from a much longer day. Sour Milk Gill was altogether a different proposition. Sure, the guidebooks might say that there was a grade 1 route up the gill, but from the bottom it looked like a truly intimidating beast of a climb. The rock was slicker than Elvis's hair and the rainbow spray left no hope of escaping a soggy sock incident. But at least we could be sure of one thing: awaiting us at the end of the day was a super selection of warming Lakeland ales, home-cooked food and a place to warm our wet toes in front of a roaring log fire.

If you're planning an autumnal gill scramble then factoring in a pub en-route is the only sensible thing to do. After an embarrassing route-planning fiasco in which I'd managed to mix up Seathwaite in Dunnerdale (excellent pub, the Newfield Inn; no gill scrambling) with Seathwaite in Borrowdale (excellent gill scrambling but no pub, dammit), I picked the walkers' bar at Rosthwaite's Scafell Hotel as a suitable end point for our scrambling adventure. It would mean a scenic slog of 12km or so, taking in the summits of Green Gable and Grey Knotts as well as some gentle valley walking, and the prospect of a pint at the end of the day would help silence any protest from our calf muscles.

We left the car in the overspill parking at the Scafell Hotel and set off along the river to Seathwaite. An alternative here if you're short on time or energy would be to park in Seathwaite itself and complete a 7km loop over Green Gable, descending via Aaron Slack before cheating with a short drive to either the Scafell Hotel or the even more idyllic Langstrath Country Inn at the end of the walk. If you do choose to take shank's pony, though, then the river ramble is absurdly pretty and delivers you to the bottom of Sour Milk Gill within an hour or so. Behind you the lush Borrowdale valley peters off into looming hills and in front the gill cascades down the northern flank of Base Brown in a series of craggy waterfalls.

This is where things started to get really interesting. Instead of following the weekend crowds up the officially sanctioned path, we branched off to hop over a crumbling drystone wall and gain the bottom of the gill. The official reports will tell you that following the bed of the gill directly is a grade 3 scramble but that it's easily possible to stay within the lower grades by sticking to the rocks on either side of the water. That would be an accurate enough assessment if it weren't for the ice-like slipperiness of said rock. Every step is an exercise in caution; every stone tries its best to shrug you off and deposit you into the fast-flowing waters below. Ten minutes in, the rainbow spray had thoroughly soaked us from the waist down and we'd resigned ourselves to squelching through the rest of the day with soggy socks.

Despite all that, though, we were having the time of our lives. Gill scrambling isn't nearly so much of an expert art as its drier cousin. It tends (with some notable exceptions) to be less exposed – you might twist an ankle sliding off a rock, but you're unlikely to end up at the bottom of a crag with a broken leg. You also find yourself using anything to hand, from slimy old tree trunks to big handfuls of marsh grass. Progress is



Views quickly open up over Borrowdale

The trickier waterfalls can be avoided by keeping to the right

***[Previous spread]* Ascending one of Sour Milk Gill's many waterfalls**

BEHIND YOU THE LUSH BORROWDALE VALLEY PETERS OFF INTO LOOMING HILLS AND IN FRONT THE GILL CASCADES DOWN IN A SERIES OF CRAGGY WATERFALLS



messier and more haphazard than dry climbing and for the majority of the time it would probably be best described as stepping-stones on steroids rather than scrambling. If you're prepared to drop the expectations, though, then you'll embrace a whole different kind of adventure.

"The best bit," said Guy, pausing to find a route over a plunge pool, "is how the people on the path keep sticking their head through the trees and staring at us enviously."

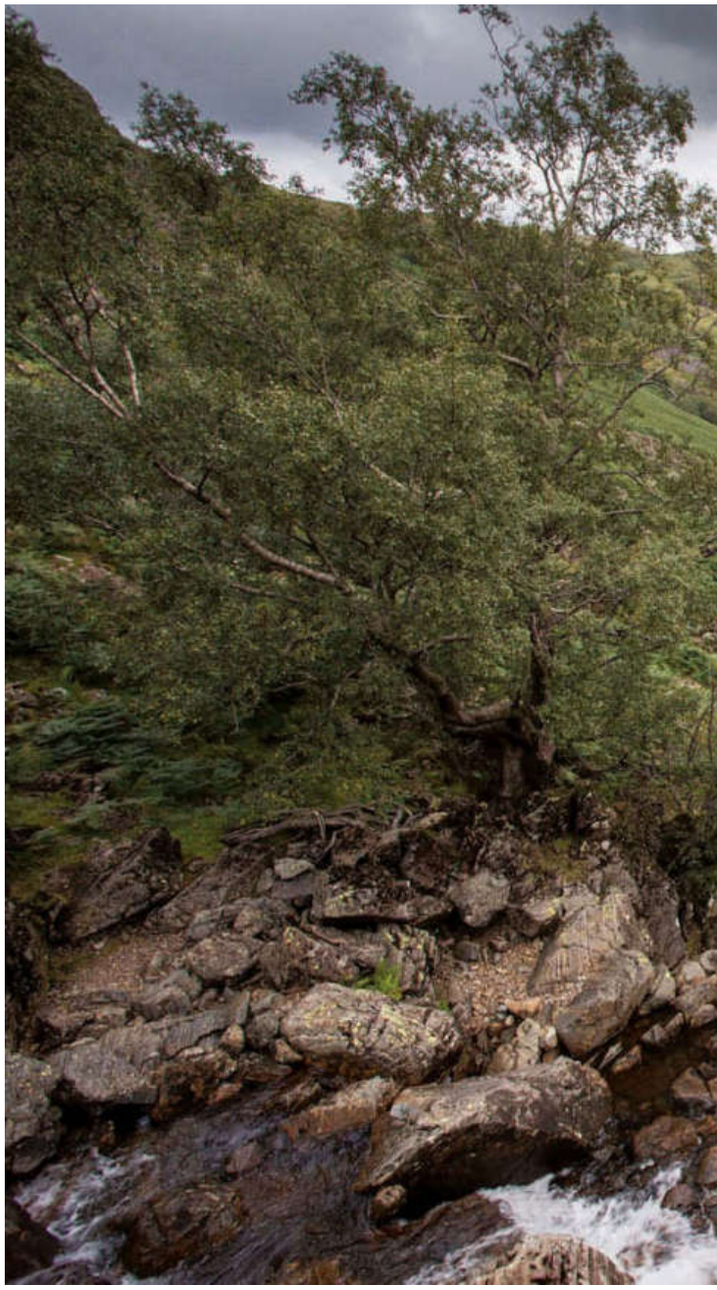
The weeping vegetation that grew lushly around the gill during that first section hid the unfolding views – but after an hour or so of scrabbling up increasingly ferocious waterfalls, the ground levelled out and we were treated to a patchwork panorama of Borrowdale. The ribbon of fields that ran like a river along the valley bottom was still a spring-like electric green, but the trees blanketing the foot of Thornythwaite Fell beyond were just beginning to take on a rusty tinge. Autumn was on its way; we could feel it in the sharp nip of the wind and smell it in the mouldering tang of the vegetation.

The bulk of the gill scrambling drew to a close shortly after the path meandered south-west into the hanging valley of Gillercomb. At this point we rejoined the main route, revelling in the seclusion of this secret spot and speculating as to whether you could find a decent wild camping pitch among Sour Milk Gill's branching tributaries. The best thing about scrambling in any form is that it generally speeds you up the steepest bit of a hill while the adrenaline cancels out puffing lungs and complaining muscles. We were already 400m or so up, with only a short climb to go to the short ridge between Base Brown and Green Gable.

It was here that the mountainous views really began to sing out. Below a dark stream of scudding cloud we could see across to Seathwaite Fell and beyond to the distant broken contours making up the northern approach to Scafell Pike. It would only have been a 10-minute diversion to bag the 646m summit of Base Brown here, but instead we branched off east and were soon admiring even more commanding views from atop Green Gable. If I'd been Iron Man fit and fancied a truly epic day then I might just have been tempted to continue over Great Gable here and descend for lunch at the Wasdale Head Inn before gaining Grey Knotts via Black Sail Pass. But we'd already eyed a veil of thick cloud blowing our way from the west. We managed to snap a few moody summit shots and take a quick picture of the descent from Green Gable with Buttermere beyond, before cloying mists enveloped us.

The ridge that links Great Gable and Honister is usually superlatively scenic, but the weather had turned grim and declined to grant us even a glimpse of the views from Grey Knotts. Those last few miles downhill to Rosthwaite were accomplished in swirling autumnal fog that made us even more thankful to plunge into the steamy, beer-scented bar at the Scafell Hotel.

There's nothing gastro about this muddy boots bar, but if you're a fan of local ales, fairylight-hung beams and decently starchy pub grub then it won't disappoint. The focus is squarely on hill folk, with dogs welcome throughout, black and white pictures of hardy-looking walkers plastering the walls and a fire big enough to dry wet boots handily positioned right behind the bar. We unapologetically stripped our boots off, adding even further to the atmosphere, and toasted the day's success with a celebratory pint. It had been long. It had been tiring. But like all my favourite days in the hills, it had been one grand adventure.

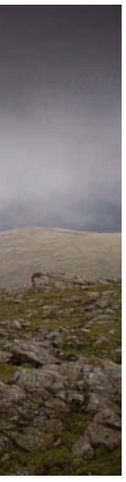




[*main image*] Moody views up Borrowdale

[*bottom row, from left*] Mists obscure Buttermere on the descent from Green Gable; the cosy walkers' bar tucked behind the Scafell Hotel; that pint was well-deserved









TOP 5 LAKE DISTRICT SCRAMBLES WITH A PUB FINISH

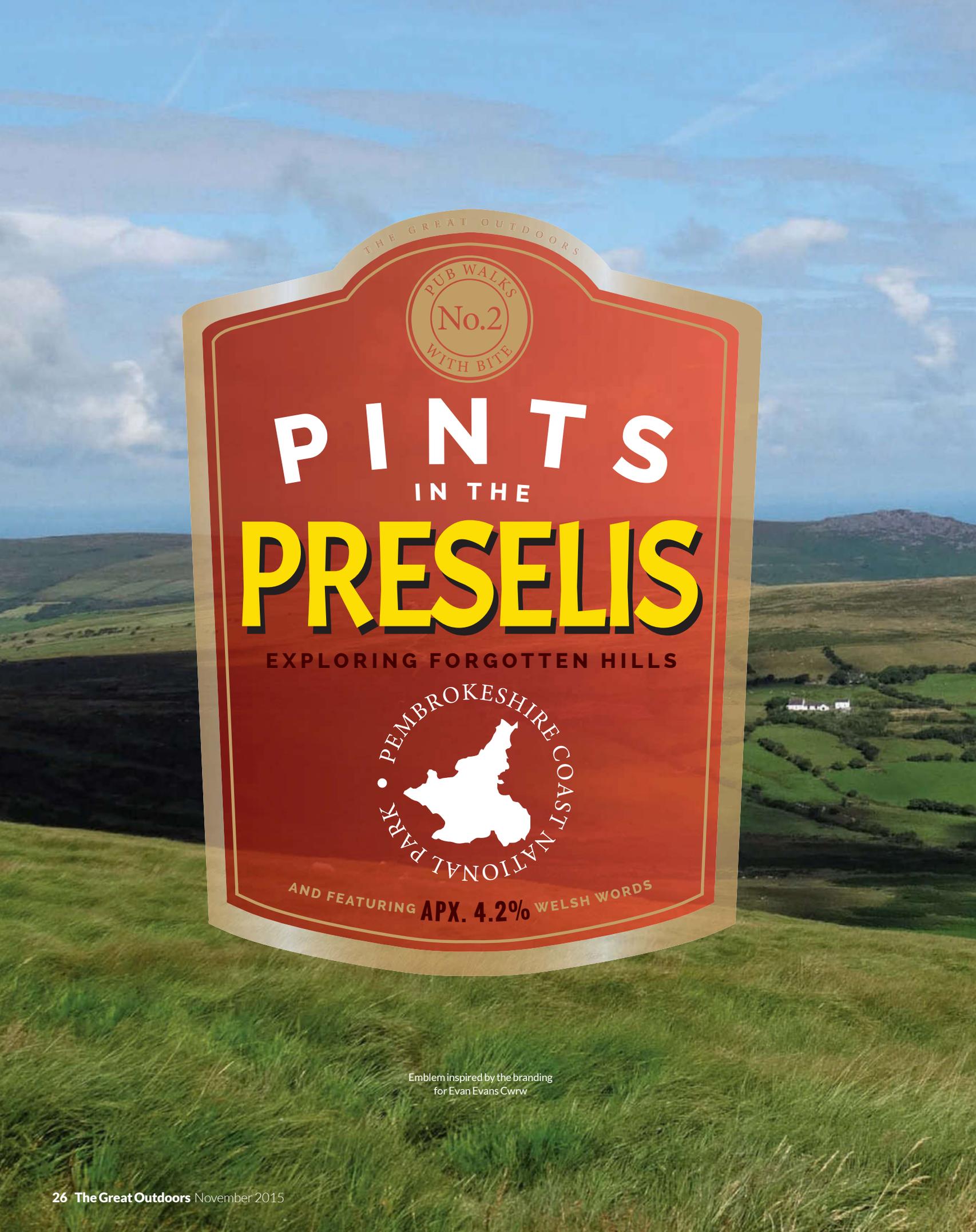
1. JACK'S RAKE
Looming menacingly above Stickle Tarn, the diagonal rake across the face of Pavey Ark is one of the best grade 1 scrambles in the Lakes. The Old Dungeon Ghyll and the New Dungeon Ghyll, both of which boast excellent walkers' bars, await at the end of the day.

2. PINNACLE RIDGE
Start your day on this classic grade 3 scramble from Glenridding, and you'll be able to recover your nerves post-expedition with a veritable pub-crawl. The Travellers Rest, Ratchers Tavern and the Ramblers Bar all lay on good food and local ales. After tackling St Sunday Crag's famously spiky Pinnacle Ridge, you'll certainly be in need of a stiff one.

3. NEEDLE RIDGE
I'm told it's illegal to mention the Lake District's top walking pubs without referencing the Wasdale Head Inn. Fortunately the inn is the start and end point for the fabulous climb-cum-scramble that is Needle Ridge on Great Gable. The ridge strays into V Diff territory at points, making good ropework skills a must, but if you can manage it then this is a thrilling day out.

4. CAM CRAG
The best grade 2 scramble in the Lakes? Many hill folk certainly think so. Cam Crag Ridge has the benefit of solid, grippy rock, imposing exposure and beautiful views – not to mention the lure of the Langstrath Country Inn at the end of the day.

5. LONG CRAG
Coniston is blessed with oodles of excellent scrambles. Long Crag is among the best grade 1s in the area, although if you're up for a big mountain challenge then grade 3 Easy Terrace on Dow Crag offers a superb day out. There are plenty of pubs to choose from in the village, too, with the Ship Inn particularly worthy of a visit.



Emblem inspired by the branding for Evan Evans Cwrw



WILL RENWICK COMBINES A VISIT TO A UNIQUE CORRUGATED IRON PUB WITH A HILLTOP SLEEP AND A MORNING WANDER









Tafarn Sinc

[*top right*] The walk up Foel Cwmcerwyn from the pub

[*bottom right*] Teilo the dog waits to get going

[*Previous spread*] Carningli Mountain with Newport Bay behind

"YOU GO FIRST."

"No, you go first."

My friend Sam and I weren't arguing over who was going to make the initial leap over a crevasse or lead the way on a grade 3 scramble, we were bickering over who would be the first to order at the bar – something all too familiar from our schooldays in South Wales. This time the problem was no longer that we weren't of the legal drinking age, it was that there was a worrying sign above the bar. It read something along the lines of: "Please order in Welsh."

"Quick! What's the Welsh for '*can I have…*'?"

We were both regretting, more than ever before, that we hadn't listened in GCSE Welsh classes. Sam stepped up to the mark:

"Cwrw os gwelwch yn dda."

Those not familiar with Welsh will think that with such a long line-up of consonant-heavy words he'd nailed it. Not quite. Its translation is simply: "Beer please."

The bar lady's English reply condemned our attempt but her smile showed she appreciated that we had at least tried.

"And which beer would that be?" she asked.

Rosebushes' Tafarn Sinc translates as the Zinc Tavern, chosen in reference to the pub's shell of corrugated galvanised iron. It's now painted bright red, and sits like an oversized garden shed below the slopes of the surrounding Preseli Hills. It was originally built in 1876 as a hotel to cater for those arriving on the Maenclochog railway line but eventually ran out of guests when the railway closed after the end of the local slate mining industry. The station platform now serves as the pub's beer garden with the signage forming centrepieces for the flowerbeds. In the station shelter, eerie mannequins dressed in 19th Century clothing wait for a never-arriving train. We decided to stay inside.

Despite being the highest pub in the Preseli Hills (and a good drive from the nearest town) Tafarn Sinc is busy. A line of farmers were leaning against the bar, their wellies clogged with the sawdust that coated the floor. We settled for a corner by the log-burner and while Sam worked out where we were going to set up camp later on, I tried to get my head around the room's décor. All manner of curiosities are hung from the wooden beams overhead, with seemingly no method to the madness. There's a full leg of ham (is it real?), farm machinery, a chair (!?) cattle horns, shoes. On the walls are pictures of Rosebushes' villagers through the ages: the local quarrymen, the farmers, rugby teams and Edwardian school pupils.

Sam broke me from my bewilderment with a nudge and pointed his finger on the map to a summit called Foel Cwmcerwyn. At 536m it's the highest in the Preseli Hills and is only a 2km walk from the pub – plenty of time to fit in a second round of Cwrw Sinc and some bangers and mash before we headed off to catch the sunset. I walked to the bar, practising my order of 'selsig a stwnsh' in my head.



OUR POSITION AND THE CLEAR AUTUMN AIR PROVIDED WHAT WAS PROBABLY ONE OF THE BEST GAMES OF 'I SPY' THAT CAN BE HAD IN THIS COUNTRY

SUNSET SHENANIGANS

What a sunset it turned out to be. With the tent pitched, we prepared our after-dinner coffee just in time to savour the sight of the sun sinking below the tip of St David's peninsula at the Land's End of Wales. Our position and the clear autumn air provided what was probably one of the best games of 'I Spy' that can be had in this country:

"I spy with my little eye something beginning with W.H."

"Easy… Worm's Head."

"L.P?"

"Llŷn Peninsula."

"S?"

"Sea? Stars? Sheep!? I give up."

"It's Snowdon!" Sam said triumphantly.

Could he really see it? I traced my finger north along Cardigan Bay's coastline from the lights of Aberystwyth to a dark cluster of mountains. Indeed there it was – a particularly sharp-peaked one stood above the rest.

The Preselis are Wales's most westerly of hills, flanked on three sides by sea. If the UK is going to have a rainy day, those in these hills will usually be the first to know. At six o'clock the next morning, I popped my head out of the tent to assess the situation and went back to sleep happy. An hour later I wondered whether I could hear a pitter-patter on the fly sheet. My fears of rain were confirmed when my dog, Teilo, nipped outside and arrived back, immediately shaking off a rain-heavy coat and trailing his muddy paws all over my sleeping bag. The joys of camping with a dog.

Yesterday we could see for over 100 miles. Now, as we set off, we couldn't see further than 10 metres. This was a bit more like the Preseli Hills I know and love. We walked into the



gloom, joining the 'Golden Road' heading east. This 5,000-year-old trail is believed to have been a superhighway for trade, a ridgeway route across the Preseli range that might once have linked the rest of mainland Britain with a crossing point for Ireland. It's also thought that it might have been used to transport the bluestone from these hills over to Salisbury to build Stonehenge. Some of the stones located both here and at Stonehenge are said to produce the same ringing sound when struck (the translation for the nearby village of Maenclochog is 'ringing stones'). We stood in the cloud tapping at a boulder as Teilo watched on with his head cocked sideways. Nothing.

We kept on eastwards along Pembrokeshire's ridgeway, enjoying its wilderness: the black peat that will swallow your foot with a wayward step off the path, the mystical stones pointed like canines and a salty smell reminding us of our





proximity to the sea. Soon we could see the coast as well as smell it, when a cloud suddenly swept aside to frame the bright blue water of Newport bay, which peeped out from behind the craggy top of Carningli. Behind us, the cloud lifted over the hill that we had slept on, showing that it had a chunk missing – the hands of hundreds having scraped into its bowels to extract its slate in the 19th Century.

BECKONED BACK BY BEER

While the resting place of King Arthur is unknown, the legend that he is buried underneath the once grand structure of Glastonbury Abbey is one that today carries the most clout. Glastonbury is certainly a more glamorous spot than here on a soggy hill in a somewhat unknown hill range. The 13 stones that make up the Neolithic stone circle of Bedd Arthur ('Arthur's Grave') are so short that you'd be forgiven for stubbing your toes on them. Still, the setting and obscurity of the site does provide a certain mystical atmosphere – in fact some reckon Bedd Arthur might even be Stonehenge's prototype, owing to the similarities in their oval design.

We could have carried on further along the Golden Road, ticking off its pagan reminders one by one, but it was nearing lunchtime and as our minds wandered back to Tafarn Sinc our legs soon followed suit. A flock of sheep on a distant ridgeline turned in flight at the sight of us, perhaps sensing our hunger for roast Preseli lamb. The thought of this awaiting meal and a pint of Cwrw Tafarn Sinc put an extra spring in our step on the journey back along the hilltop, now bathed in sunshine.

With Pembrokeshire National Park's unofficial tagline as 'the only coastal national park in the UK', the Preseli Hills are wonderfully neglected. The fact that there is a wild and exciting range of hills here is often forgotten in favour of Pembrokeshire's big beaches and little fishing villages. But in my book that's a good thing. It means that you can spend a day in these hills without seeing a soul, and also that you can walk into a pub that is still 'proper Welsh', untouched by 21st Century gastronomy. Iechyd da! (cheers!)



Looking eastwards down the spine of the Preselis

[*top right*] Sam looks back to Foel Cwmcerwyn

The return to the pub along the hillside

[*far right*] Cwrw Tafarn Sinc ales

USEFUL WELSH WORDS AND PHRASES

Give some Welsh a go in Tafarn Sinc

Hello – Helo Good morning – Bore Da ('bor eh da') Good afternoon – Prynhawn da ('prin hawn da') Goodbye – Hwyl ('hoi ol') Please – os gwelwch yn dda ('oss gwil loch un thar') Thanks – Diolch ('dee olch') A pint of Cwrw Sinc please – Un peint o Gwrw Sinc os gwelwch yn dda ('een pint o gooroo sink oss gwil loch un thar') Cheers! – Iechyd da! ('yak ee da!')



PUBS ON THE PENINSULA

THE GRIFFIN INN, DALE
The seafront-sitting Griffin Inn is only a short walk from Marloes: a long sandy beach with tall cliffs and huge slabs of boulders and jagged rocks.

THE DYFFRYN ARMS, GWAUN VALLEY
Affectionately known as Bessie's. Bessie the landlady has been serving ale (poured from a jug) in her living room for almost 45 years now. The pub sits in a valley with steep-sided woodland on its flanks – it's a haven within the wild moorland of the Preseli Hills.

THE GOLDEN LION, NEWPORT
Head here to sample the cask ales of the Preseli Hills-based Bluestone Brewing Company. From the pub, good walking options are a climb up the rocky-topped Carningli Mountain or a wander (east or west) along the Pembrokeshire Coast Path.

THE SLOOP INN
Old fishermen's pub with lots of history displayed on its walls. It's only a short walk from 'the Blue Lagoon' at Abereiddy (pictured) – a flooded quarry that's perfect for a swim.

THE OLD POINT HOUSE
Dates back to the 1500s and doesn't seem to have changed much either. Make sure to try the circular walk around the Angle peninsula. It visits Freshwater West beach which was used in 2010 for filming scenes for both Harry Potter and Robin Hood.





Turn to page 110 to see the route map for Will's walk

DAVID LINTERN DISCOVERS HOW QUICKLY THE WEATHER CAN TURN, DURING AN OVERNIGHT TRIP ON ONE OF SCOTLAND'S MIGHTIEST MASSIFS

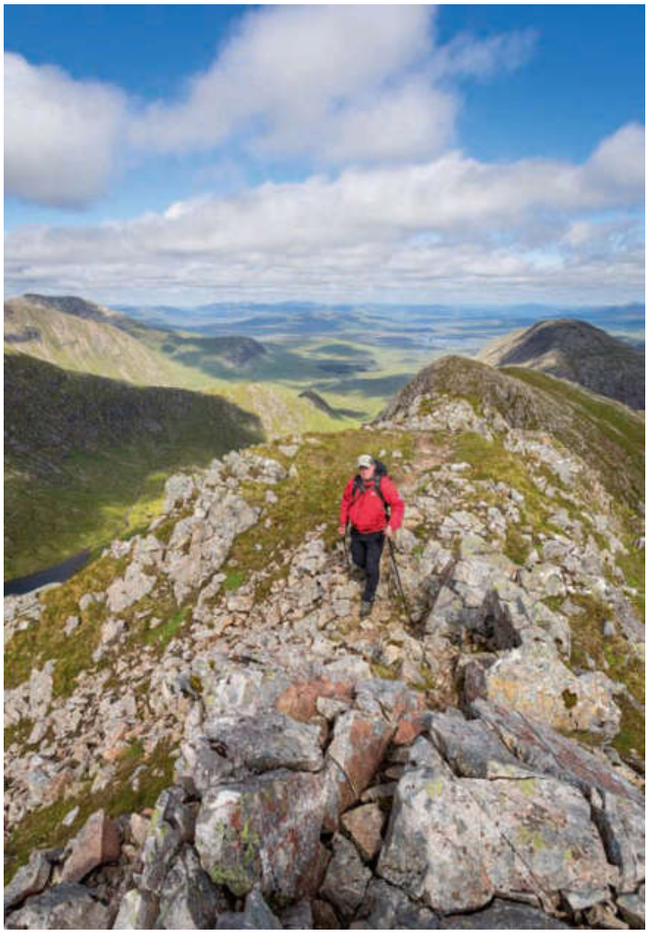


Emblem inspired by Graeme Dunnet's design for the Old Worthy Brewing Company









BETWEEN LOCH TULLA and Loch Etive there are no roads, few tracks but a whole lot of hill country to be discovered. The Black Mount is a vast, mountainous area replete with four Munros and, despite being just up the road from Glasgow, it is entirely new to both of us. Access is mind-bogglingly simple – just head up the A82 and hang a left at the Bridge of Orchy Hotel (we'll be back there later...). Mick concentrates on avoiding occasional single-track traffic on the road around Loch Tulla, while I marvel at the fragment of woodland that still clings to the shore on both sides.

Once past the other boozer on the route – the Inveroran Hotel – the road curls around to reveal the northern shore. It's superbly picturesque and ever so slightly bizarre, as if a piece of the Cairngorms has fallen out of the sky and into the more usually tree-bereft west coast. Widely spaced native pines perfectly frame the wide glen to the west and the hills to the north.

"Pass near Loch Talla, a long narrow piece of water, with a small pine wood on its side. A few weather-beaten pines and birch appear scattered up and down, and in all the bogs great numbers of roots, that evince the forest that covered the country within this half century. These were the last pines, which I saw growing spontaneously in North Britain".

The area appears often in literary history. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Dickens and Darwin all used the military road that now forms this part of the West Highway Way, but one of the earliest to pass along here was Thomas Pennant, who penned the quote above. A member of the Welsh gentry, Pennant was the Nick Crane or Bill Bryson of his time, and had published three very popular volumes of his Scottish tours by 1776.

There's a sense of a proper walk-in on this route, which I always enjoy. It's nice to let the rhythm of the day establish itself. We join the West Highland Way for a few minutes until turning off at the Forest Lodge onto a wide track in a huge glen. Later we handrail a burn on a sodden trail, up into the coire under Stob a' Choire Odhair, the 'peak of the dun coloured coire', presumably a reference to the peat hags which lend the area its name. It's a simple, if slow, affair to get to the top. We choose the more direct line which takes us up onto a slight ridge, and early lunch at noon. Views are hazy but it's still an incredible vantage point from which to look out over Rannoch Moor and its Great Wall formed by the Bridge of Orchy Munros to the south, once the dividing line between the old kingdoms of Pict in the west and Scot in the east.

At the time that Pennant was writing, Black Mount was a deer 'forest' owned by the Campbells of Breadalbane. The word forest originates from the latin 'foris' – areas first declared 'outside' the law of the land by the Normans. If you wanted to hunt here, you'd better be of the right stock! The trees that he is missing were actually quite a long time gone, victims of climate change and progressive human clearing for fuel and pasture. Later on, Black Mount was one of the first such forests to move from feudal management – with royal hunting in the uplands, and with glens and corries crofted – to become a commercial hunting estate. Darwin reflected on what these economic changes meant for the landscape at the time:

"Near Inveroran in Scotland I saw a whole hillside covered with young birch trees so nearly of the same age that I enquired why so useless a tree had been planted; but was told that about ten years before the district had been converted from sheep-



An endless horizon of wild country – over to Bidean nam Bian

The other Aonach Eagach: this is the flat bit just before the final pull up to the summit of Stob Ghabhar – simpler than its more famous cousin!

[*Left, top*] Go west – along the track from Forest Lodge

[*Left, bottom*] Looking across to Creise as the weather starts to brighten up

pasture in to a deer forest: and sheep devour young birch trees, but that deer do not. The growth of the birch, would certainly greatly alter the vegetation on the whole bank; and with the plants, the insects would change and with them the birds of which I shall presently give an instance. It is not too strong an expression to say that the introduction of a single mammal might change the whole aspect of a district, even to the minutest living details".

Back in the present moment, we turn away from the moor and into what feels like an endless horizon of wild country. We descend over interesting, knolly ground to the head of the coire, and begin the ascent of Stob Ghabhar, or 'the peak of the goat'. It's demanding in the best way – first steeply zigzagging on a spur, then onto a boulder field (which would prove treacherous in early season snow) and later levelling out onto a wide ridge which leads in turn to the final 100m to the top.

The views are spectacular all the way up. Pausing for breath on the zigzags, our eyes are drawn back to the moor, the fathomless black slit of the Coirein Lochain sitting deep in the shadows under us. Later the view opens out to Bidean nam Bian, both Buchailles, Nevis, the Mamores and beyond. We rotate our field of view south, to the Cruachan range and the Arrochar Alps, and finally west to the final piece of this wilderness puzzle, the five Munros of the Ben Starav group. The sun is out and there's a feeling of loftiness, freedom and open space all around us. The contrast between our everyday Glasgow horizon, mostly curtailed by concrete and glass, and this seemingly endless one could not be greater. But our right to roam these hills is a modern phenomenon – in the past, Black Mount was keenly policed by armed 'foresters' to prevent the poaching of deer.

OUR EYES ARE DRAWN TO THE FATHOMLESS BLACK SLIT OF THE COIREIN LOCHAIN

On the top, we choose to go north, over the warty troll's finger of Aonach Mor until the bealach leading onto the other two Munros of the Black Mount: Creise and Meall a' Bhuiridh. I've since discovered this is the route for the 'Clachlet Traverse' of all the Black Mount summits, but our ambitions will be limited by the weather tomorrow. We drop down a little to get away from the wind, now blowing furiously over the col, and retreat into our shelters by ten.

In the morning we debate our options on and off, a little half-heartedly, until the rain desists. Looking back, if we'd known that Clach Leathad was 'only' a subsidiary top of Creise, we may not have pushed on, but we didn't. "Pick a line, then" says Mick… and so I do: into the wind and cloud for the slow grind to Clach Leathad's summit cairn. By elevenses, it's obvious the weather has set in for the day. We head off quickly. Plainly not wanting to hang around in the cold, Mick starts asking for directions but I'm thrown by the cloud and by the broad summit and suspect we're farther east than we should be.

PUB WALKS No.3 WITH BITE

We handrail the spur out to Sron nam Forsair anyway, just because we can see it, and then aim off south-west for the burn dropping down to the coire. It quickly becomes steep, very loose and sandy and I'm surprised at how, in just a few seconds, I've become uneasy – on ground I'd usually judge as awkward but not difficult. Somehow, somewhere, after years of stravaiging, I've lost my taste for bad weather and steep, off-trail descents.

In truth, I know how and why it's happened. Back in May, another friend and I had set out to link Scotland's nine 4,000-footers by packraft, travelling from coast-to-coast. At the summit of Cairn Gorm, feeling fatigued, relieved and a little underwhelmed, something happened that made me doubt my judgement now.

Dave and I were walking with a fellow traveller that day – a guy called Bjorn, who we'd met at Corrour bothy. From the summit, I decided to take a wander over to have a look at a potential route down to the Fords of Avon, because I knew this side of the mountain could be avalanche-prone late in the season. Too briefly, and without explaining my intentions fully, I disappeared behind some tors and clambered a few metres over talus beyond. The route steepened lower down but the initial run-out was low key and completely free of snow. I remembered from the Harvey's map that there was a path on the left. That was enough; I felt confident we could join it. Above me, Dave wasn't impressed. He was shouting, but I couldn't hear what. He refused to come down. Eventually I walked back up and we traversed across some fairly avalanche-ready slopes to the left. I took the lead, snapping at the others to space out so we didn't overload the slope.

Lower down, we were both vindicated, after a fashion – I found the path, and where the slope cliffed out there was a huge amount of avalanche debris – but the damage was done. My lack of communication at the top, and my friend's lack of faith in my judgement, had soured the day.

David and I had gotten over ourselves in the days after Cairn Gorm, but I don't want to repeat the same mistakes coming off Clath Leathad. I love the mountains but not at the expense of my friendships. So this time, I take the talking cure. Mick seems relaxed and happy to proceed, slowly and steadily. Another five minutes and the angle eases. Slowly and gingerly we pick our way down, part-stumbling, part-skidding the scree, far down with aching knees to arrive where boulders dot slopes almost fluorescing with vibrant green growth, as the burn becomes a torrent. The deer move off as we approach our wild, littered nook. We are right at the neck of Coire Ba, an enormous glacial amphitheatre that spills out either side of our peripheral vision.

I've never seen so much bright-eyed yellow Bog Asphodel in one place, the only colour in a sea of drab, dreich and washed-out greens. We handrail the river, soaked through from the rain and the sweat of descent, and find an old track back to meet the West Highway Way and its travellers. Thomas Pennant describes his experience of coming this way as 'melancholy', but despite the miserable weather, our mood is buoyant. As we exchange nods and smiles with people who've plainly come to walk this Way from all over the world, I begin to appreciate that the camaraderie could be a real draw on the West Highland Way.

That feeling continues over a pint or two at the Bridge of Orchy Hotel bar, a real staging post, with folk of all shapes, sizes and in various states of disrepair, hobbling around in stockinged feet and comparing war stories while coats steam on the backs of chairs. We've barely been away 24 hours, but it feels like much longer. Barman, make mine a pint of Black Mountain Magic!



[This spread] **Mick makes for the summit cairn of Clath Leathad – somewhere up ahead, apparently**

We repair to (or should that be at?) the Bridge of Orchy Hotel



FIVE BIG MUNRO WALKS

FIVE GREAT PUBS FOR AFTERWARDS

AONACH EAGACH Clachaig Inn
Undoubtedly one of Scotland's finest (and most nerve-wracking) scrambling routes, the Aonach Eagach includes two Munros: Meall Dearg and Sgorr nam Fiannaidh. Not for the faint-hearted or the inexperienced scrambler. Bidean nam Bian across the glen makes for an alternative precursor to a pint in the Clachaig.

THE BEN Ben Nevis Inn
"The wee inn at the foot of the Ben" has real ales, serves local produce and if you're lucky you'll get local music to boot. First though you've got to get to the summit of the British Isles and back.

KNOYDART MUNROS The Old Forge
Not one for an idle day's strolling, Knoydart is famously remote and its pub proudly proclaims itself the remotest in the mainland. Take the trouble to get there (whether via a multi-day walk-in or by boat) and you'll want to stay a while. The Knoydart hills are worth it and you'll have four Munros at your disposal.

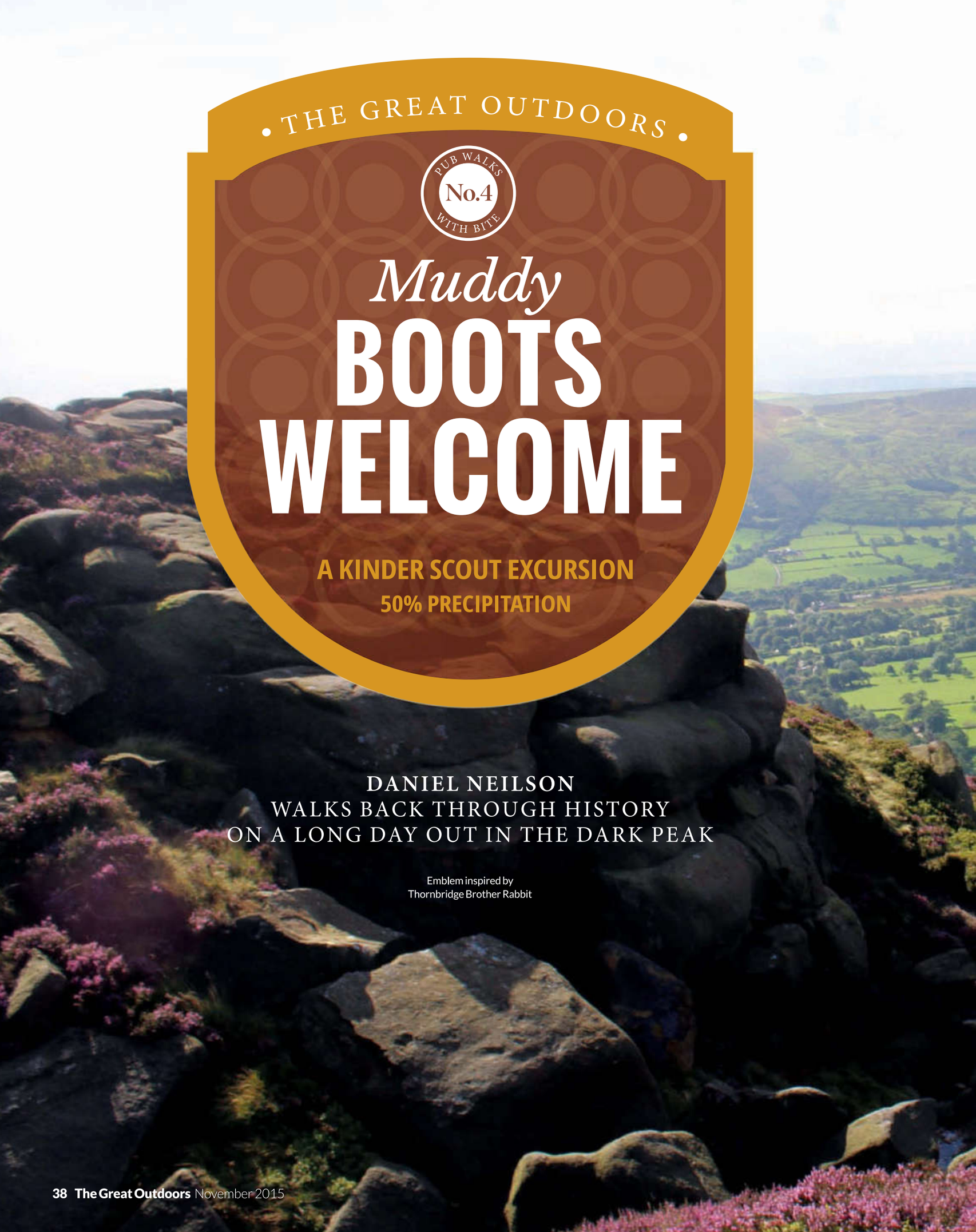
BEN LAWERS OR THE TARMACHAN RIDGE
Lawers Hotel
Take your pick. Immediately above the Ben Lawers hotel is the range of hills that gives the inn its name – seven Munros in total, which can be completed on a single, long day in summer. Alternatively, and a wee bit further west, the Tarmachan Ridge is a slightly less ambitious but equally classic day out.

DRIESH & MAYAR Glen Clova Hotel
Away to the Angus Glens, and the beautiful Glen Clova. Bag the Munros of Mayar and Driesh from the head of the glen and then stop off at the Glen Clova Hotel for dinner and a drink before returning home.

PUB WALKS No.4 WITH BITE

Muddy BOOTS WELCOME

A KINDER SCOUT EXCURSION
50% PRECIPITATION



DANIEL NEILSON
WALKS BACK THROUGH HISTORY
ON A LONG DAY OUT IN THE DARK PEAK

Emblem inspired by
Thornbridge Brother Rabbit

EVERY PUB IS ON THE WAY to somewhere. Through the long nights of history, it has been the poorly lit squeaking pub sign that has been the beacon signalling safety: for drovers, for soldiers, for coffin-bearers, for post coaches, for travellers in a hurry, for travellers at leisure. For more than 1,000 years, the English inn has been the final destination after a day's work, after a day's travel and, in this instance, after a day's walking.

But it's once you are in the pub that life gets interesting. 'Publick houses', as Daniel Defoe first referred to them in 1720, were, and still are, exactly that. Anyone of the permitted age range can enter, stay and drink. While no one would pretend that it is completely egalitarian, there are few other touch-points in society for all social strata, professions and backgrounds. Life's rich tapestry is here. They are the centre of communities, have occasionally been courts, and places to discuss the matters of the day. Alehouses and taverns are also the seeding places of dissent, as governments from the Romans have known. The Levellers and Luddites met in pubs to discuss how to manifest their dissent, as did the striking miners and steel workers late in the 20th Century. Pubs affect life for everyone whether you visit them or not – history happens in them. And my destination on a September day was a pub that had affected yours.





Above Hope Cross on the eastern flanks of Kinder Scout

[*right, top*] Looking back down the Hope Valley from Win Hill

[*right, bottom*] Grindsbrook Clough from Ringing Roger on Kinder Scout

[*far right*] Sheep on Win Hill

[*Previous spread*] Overlooking the Vale of Edale from Kinder Scout

To the Peak!

Eddie Mair was interviewing a meteorologist on PM as I drove to Castleton, south over the Pennines the evening before my walk. Noticeable in the weatherman's voice was a slightly higher pitch than normal. The day of my walk was, we were excitably told, to be one full of 'weather' (although the words 'weather' and 'event' were never put together – no one ever wants to hear the words 'weather' and 'event' next to each other when planning a walk).

I'm a meticulous planner when it comes to a route – I enjoy the planning almost as much as the walk (the same can't be said for my gear planning which once left me without cutlery for six days over the Andes – but that's another story). As I ate my pasta and pesto (a modern youth hostel classic) I checked MWIS and the Met Office's mountain weather forecast and went with the one that seemed to offer the most optimism. The circular route I planned was walking out of YHA Castleton Losehill Hall, over the Great Ridge connecting Mam Tor with Lose Hill, skirting around the edge of Kinder Scout, climbing up Win Hill and back to the hostel, or vice versa. Both directions included a conveniently timed pub for lunch (if I set off early enough) and either way there was a hint of adventure – there's always a hint of adventure on Kinder Scout. Leaving my options open, I stuffed in my earplugs and set my alarm early.

An early start

I set off under fickle Derbyshire skies, admiring the ever-changing hues colouring the jutting crags and river-cut valleys of the Peak District. The best of the weather was in the afternoon so I walked anti-clockwise ,wanting gentler conditions on the Kinder plateau. My late lunch stop would be the Old Nag's Head in Edale, rather than the also very good Yorkshire Bridge Inn. I left the grounds of the Victorian gothic mansion through the car park out the back and straight on to a footpath leading to Hope where I picked up provisions (incidentally, the day before writing this article, I came across the remnants of the contents of my lunchbox and donated it to science – you probably didn't need to know that).

I followed a small lane up to Aston Hall on the slopes of Win Hill and then jutted off on an indistinct path around its southern and eastern slopes. The sheep were pleasingly sprayed with a splodge of paint the exact same shade as the heather flowers that paint the Dark Peak at this time of year. I imagined the farmer picking the colour out of a swatch: "That's the one!" he or she would have exclaimed, pointing to the one named 'Vivid Morning Heather Flower Dew' or something. The sheep, however, not the most self-aware species, just chewed gormlessly on the heather. It's an important food source for livestock, especially when snow covers the Dark Peak. It also feeds grouse, heather Beetles and moths and







PUB WALKS No.4 WITH BITE

THE ATMOSPHERE CHANGED PERCEPTIBLY; THE WIND PICKED UP, THE WORLD DARKENED, WHILE A SENSE OF APPREHENSION FILLED MY MIND

butterflies. In fact, *Calluna vulgaris* is a remarkably useful shrub. Perhaps because of its ubiquity in moorland places, it has been used to dye wool and tan leather. And more relevant for an article about a pub walk, it has been widely used in gruit, a mixture of herbs used to flavour beer before hops were introduced in Britain the 14th Century (a heather ale is still brewed by the William Brothers Brewing Co in Glasgow). Heather is also used by people to make brooms, by bees to make honey, and by Austrians to treat urinary tract disorders.

I climbed through a Winhill Plantation, more ancient and gnarly than its name suggests, and high on to Win Hill Pike, known to locals as 'the Pimple' (according to Wikipedia). Ladybower Reservoir, of the Dambusters Fame, stretched to the north, looking cold. To the north-east I could see the rest of my walk around Kinder Scout with Lose Hill just about blocking my view of Edale. I could also see the 'weather' promised on Radio 4. It's a view you only ever really see walking: that wall of rain shrouding the distant hills. It was moving towards me at pace, turning all it past to a dark shade of grey. The atmosphere changed perceptibly; the wind picked up, the world darkened, while a sense of apprehension filled my mind. "Retreat, retreat" it screamed. High on the Dark Peak I was due for a soaking. I felt very alone. Then my phone rang. I described the scene in detail to my caller, grateful for the company, before the rather confused PPI compensation salesman hung up and no doubt struck me off a list.

I trod along the Roman road with a sense of urgency, hoping in some way I could escape the inevitable. Then God turned his shower on. There was nowhere to hide except in the trees that I avoided – no one likes to see 'risk of lightning' on



THERE WAS "ENOUGH BLUE TO MAKE DOLLY PARTON A PAIR OF KNICKERS", AS MY WIFE WOULD SAY

the MWIS forecast. I pulled all the drawcords I could find on my waterproof tight around my face. The noise seemed tremendous. I put my head down and started up the slopes of Kinder Scout. 10.30am may be early to hit the pub, but I desperately wanted to be there, drying my trousers in front of a fire and drinking something dark and thick. At a fingerpost I stopped for a sandwich. The bread was soggy before I brought it to my mouth and I laughed out loud. If nothing, our hobby is exhilarating in a storm. A crack of thunder brought me back to reality and I sped on. The sight of a relatively dry fell-runner gave me some confidence as I topped out on Kinder plateau by Crookstone Out Moor. I did have plans to visit Madwoman's Stones, if nothing else to enjoy some navigational adventure by heading into the groughs of the plateau, but forgot entirely as I moved on. (I was once crossing Kinder at Seven-Minute Crossing and I came across a mountain rescue team on an exercise to find lost walkers, and as well as finding those in on the exercise, they'd also found two genuinely lost groups of walkers).

Looking up, I sensed a change again in the weather. There was "enough blue to make Dolly Parton a pair of knickers", as my Canadian wife would say. Behind me, the wall of rain was drenching the world eastward, and to the west I could see breaks in the cloud formations that spectacularly punched high into the troposphere. I took down my hood and marvelled at the vibrant greens of the Vale of Edale. What a rich land this is. I jotted along the path at the edge of the plateau, past the Ringing Roger stones and towards my next destination of Grindsbrook Clough. In the distant I watched in horror as a group of DofE participants climbed the steep, grassy slopes alongside the clough, my hand on my phone. They made it eventually, but I think they'd have lost points. I made the point to another group of walkers who seemed thoroughly unconcerned: "Ha, they'd better be careful with those big rucksacks," one said. So, feeling like one of those hillwalking busybodies you occasionally encounter (one week of ML training and now I can give everyone advice!) I sheepishly descended Grindsbrook Clough pondering what I'd become. But there's nothing like a pint to put everything back in perspective, especially when it's a very good 5.1% dark ale.

Sanctuary for drowned rats

'Muddy boots welcome' is the sign you need to see when you're approaching a pub looking like a drowned rat. The Old Nags Head, in a smithy dating back to 1577, has been welcoming people for hundreds of years. Workers at the water-powered cotton mill in Edale would have certainly known it. An information board on Hollins Cross claims Richard Arkwright built it in 1792, also the year of his death, but I can't verify that. The inn is probably best known as the









official start of the Pennine Way, Britain's first long-distance trail conceived by the campaigner Tom Stephenson, and opened in 1965. It was the result of a campaign that famously started on Kinder Scout itself with the Mass Trespass in 1932. The rebellious ramblers left from Bowden Bridge towards Edale. Gamekeepers on William Clough had other ideas, yet after the famous scuffle they met a group of Sheffield ramblers who had left from Edale on Kinder itself. The joyous groups then retraced their steps home – one to Manchester, and the other to Sheffield via Edale, and no doubt the Old Nags Head.

Photographic evidence of another walking milestone is also displayed on the walls of the pub – the launch of the first National Park warden service in the country. On Good Friday 1954, three years after the Peak District became the country's first national park, Tom Tomlinson became the first head warden. With him in the photos is the landlord of the Nag's Head Inn, as it was then called, Fred Heardman. He was affectionately known as 'Bill the Bogtrotter' for his love of walking, and was an active campaigner for the formation of the Peak District National Park. Fred's wife Helen, a midwife, also found her own fame as a pioneer of natural childbirth, with her book *A Way to Natural Childbirth* becoming a key text for midwives.

I sat in the beer garden with a pint of Nag's 1577, a pitch-black beer, like I'd dreamt about earlier in the day, and read more about the Kinder Trespass on my phone. And then, with legs heavy with ale, I continued my walk under the TransPennine railway, over Hollins Cross, and back to the hostel. In my mind was a quote I saw in the pub: "A rambler made is a man improved."

Old Nags Head in Edale

Falling water at Golden Cough

Turn to page 109 to see the route map for Daniel's walk

Five other great PEAK DISTRICT PUB WALKS

1. ALONG THE EDGES
Grindleford to Bamford, 13km/7 miles
Good transport links mean that you can walk from Grindleford Train Station, along Millstone Edge and over Hathersage Moor to the car park above Stanage Edge. Walk along Stanage Edge before descending into Bamford and having a pint at The Anglers Rest, the first community-owned pub in Derbyshire.

2. THROUGH CHATSWORTH
Baslow to Rowsley and back, 15km/ 8miles
The Devonshire Arms at Beeley is one of the best in the Peak District. This route starts at Baslow and follows the Derwent Valley Heritage Way past Chatsworth House, takes a small detour for an exceptional ploughman's lunch at the Devonshire Arms to Rowsley – home of the Peacock restaurant if you want to splash out. To walk back to Baslow, follow footpaths to the west, and into Edensor. Cross back down to Chatsworth and follow a track back to your start.

3. FLASH BY NAME, NOT NATURE
Flash and Dane Valley Way, 11km/6.5 miles
The New Inn in Flash is reportedly the highest village pub in England. Either way, this walk is in very remote countryside. From Flash, walk north to Hilltop to meet the Dane Valley Way at Cheeks Hill. Turn left onto the path and follow it along River Dane to Three Shires Head where Derbyshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire meet. And then down to Spring Head and then back up to Flash.

4. DOWN IN THE DALES
Hartington to Hulme End circular, 14km/7.5 miles
This beautiful walk from Hartington follows the picturesque Wolfscote Dale along the River Dove and back via two good pubs, the George in Alstonefield and the Manifold in Hulme End and back to Hartington. The walk can be done either way around.

5. YORKSHIRE BRIDGE CIRCULAR
Around Ladybower Reservoir, 14km/9 miles
An easily extendable walk is a gentle stroll around Ladybower Reservoir starting and ending at the Yorkshire Bridge Inn. Cross the bridge north and left towards Ladybower Reservoir. Follow the path on the east side of the reservoir to the end. After Jubilee Cottages, cross to the other side, and climb up Haggside and walk along the ridge back towards the bridge.

Patagonia Ice Cap trek

CHIZ DAKIN HEADS OUT ONTO THE VAST WHITE WILDERNESS OF THE PATAGONIAN ICE CAP



LAND *of* ICE


and SPIRES

[*page 48*] **Looking towards the upper Viedma glacier**

[*page 49*] **The summit of Cerro Fitz Roy peaking out of the clouds – viewpoint from moraine above Lago Electrico**



A SMALL BLACK DOT appears off to the right, almost imperceptible above the never-ending rise of snow-slope onto the Patagonian ice cap. With every hard-earned step we take, sinking calf-deep into the soft snow on the final stages of the glaciated pass, the dot grows and is joined by another off to its left, then another. They slowly merge into a thin jagged line then become a perceptible mountain rising above the horizon at the same glacial pace as our labouring uphill progress.

We're in Patagonia, a majestic mountainous region of jagged spires and shapely peaks poking out of a vast sea of ice in the farthest south of South America. And the shapely snow-covered rocky mountain that's emerging is Gorra Blanca. It lies north of our intended route as we exit the Marconi Pass from Argentina into Chile and head onto the ice cap. No border formalities though – those take place in the small frontier town-cum-trekking capital of El Chalten, now 1,000m lower than us.

Our plan is for a 10-day expedition up onto the ice cap, and towards its centre at the Paso del Cuatro Glaciares – a point where four glaciers have their heads. From there we hope to ascend a 3,500m massif by the name of Cordon Mariano Moreno, probably by the east ridge. We have little information on its difficulties as conditions are rarely good enough to reach it, but believe it to be a relatively easy snow plod once across the ice sheet. A long shot perhaps, but a good 'ideal' objective to have.

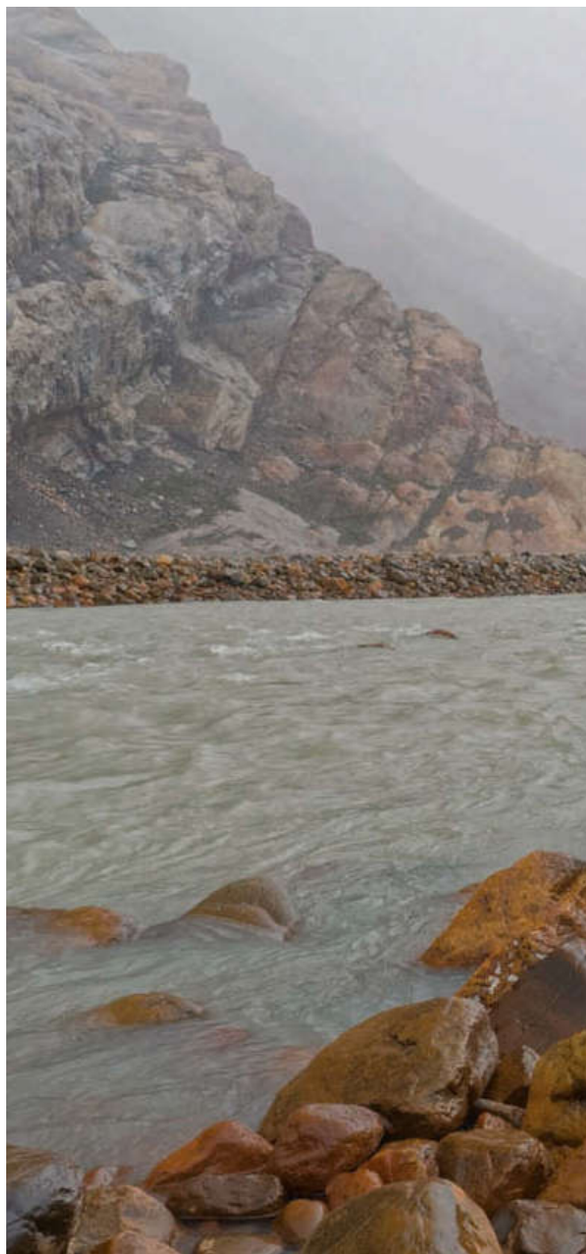
Already reality has hit our dreams hard. Less than a mile into the expedition we're feeling the strain of rucksacks weighing us down like pack yaks as we dance the 'shoulder shuffle' along the trail. With no resupply of food and fuel possible over the expected 10-11 days, and needing to carry mountaineering kit as well as cold and windy weather wear, most of us are starting with 25-30kg – far heavier than our 20kg goal. But we are committed now. We can't ditch any more weight, can't get any fitter – we can only hope that the weather is kind to us.

That of course is critical to any expedition. But especially so in Patagonia, where hurricane-plus winds are frequent visitors. We're lucky though; our expedition leader Richard Hartley has negotiated professional weather forecasting services with Steph Ball of the newly set-up MeteoGib. We have yet to see how accurate these are.

For now, drizzle and moderate winds are expected in the low valleys before we reach the Marconi glacier. As we exit a woodland valley which has sheltered us so far, the 'moderate' wind hits us and briefly knocks me sideways onto Kiersten (Richard's wife). It won't let go for another couple of days. Surprised by its strength, we briefly wonder if this is the start of a Föhn wind – which can come out of nowhere. But no, these are still light to moderate by Patagonian standards, only gusting about force 6-7. Although higher up they'll be stronger.

For now, crossing the Rio Pollone is a bigger challenge. A typical Patagonian glacial river, it's usually deeper in the afternoon from daytime ice melt. But Richard has a cunning plan – by stopping early the previous night, we are now in position to cross it with the lower water levels of mid-morning. Weight of the pack temporarily forgotten, I race ahead over the bouldery delta – with great plans to get some stunning shots of the rest of the team... only to be thwarted by the river itself.

It's higher than expected. The normal crossing near its braided delta appears impassable – at least without soaking feet and boots, not clever on the way up to the ice. As others join me on the banks of the swirling torrent, we slowly wander upstream. Each of us investigates potential ways over and we end up crossing in ones and twos, some of us with hearts in mouths as we balance from one slippery giant boulder to another, others eventually just accepting very wet feet nearer the delta. The camera remains in the rucksack; nobody wants to repeat a crossing just for a photo.



Although we're wild camping, there are some 'officially recognised' spots marked on local maps which we're expected to use. Arriving at the first, 'La Playita' (a gravelly widening of the river bed above the Lago Electrico), we meet another group heading onto the ice cap: a surprisingly rare occurrence as most visitors to the region don't venture higher than the valley-based walking trails. This group is a mixed American/Argentinian team, and regale us with tales of the previous night's floods, which they spent half the night digging drainage channels against. On the plus side, so far our weather forecasts have been spot-on, and rain isn't predicted for tonight.

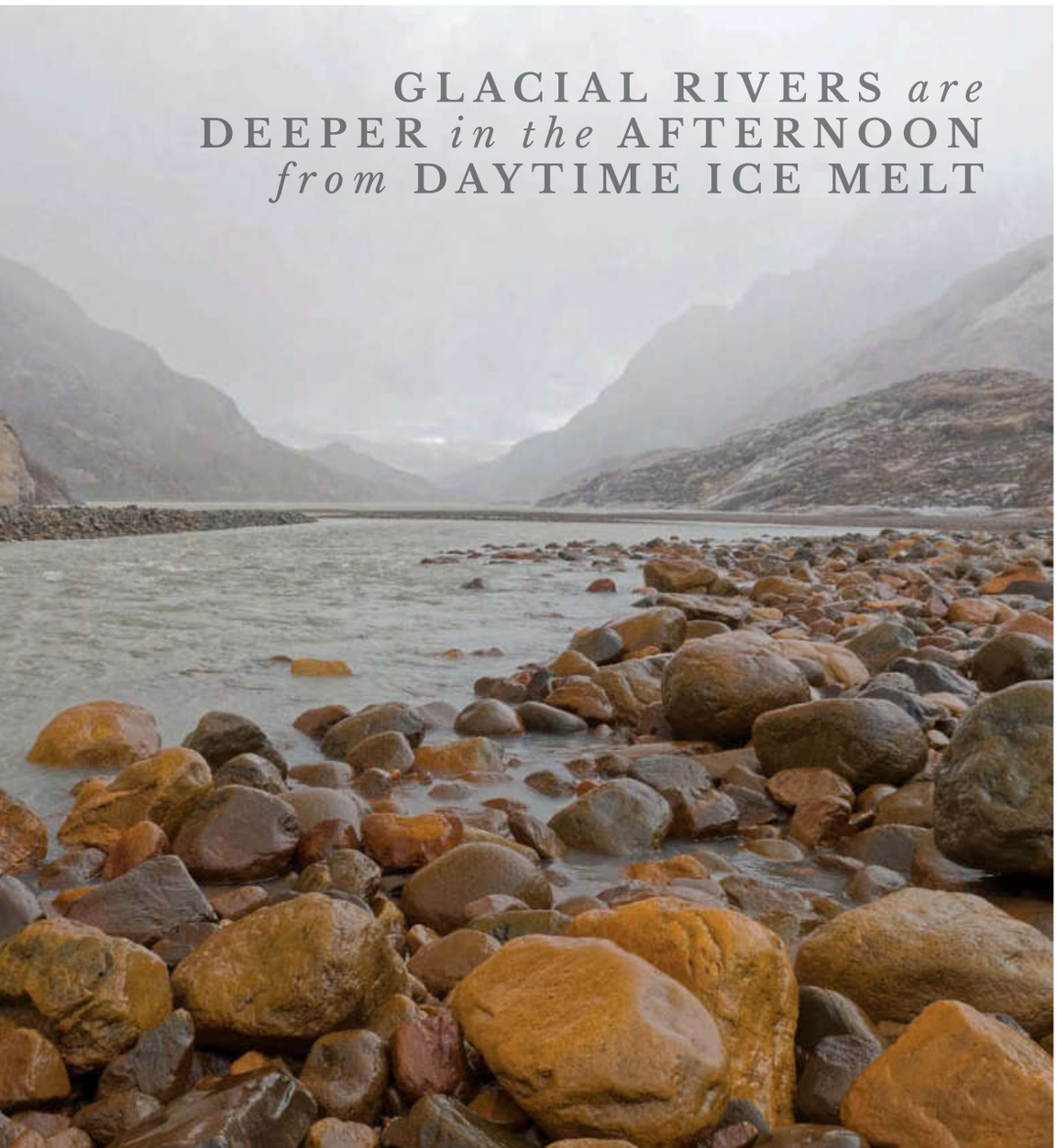
The night passes without incident, although our next weather update is for strong winds, suggesting a day's delay at La Playita. But our neighbours are keen to get going regardless; they've already had a day's strong-wind delay. Before they leave, we chat briefly to one of the local members of their team and hear some worrying news. Crevasses in the centre of the ice cap are enormous, and the snowfall was very poor this year. Not good at all.

A day later, we are inching our way up the Marconi Glacier. The weather feels unexpectedly warm for glacier travel, and intermittent avalanches near an elliptical band of exposed rock on Marconi Norte are concerning. But once past the steep and hard initial steps onto the glacier and up its snout, the going becomes relatively easy underfoot. With crampons biting smoothly into the firm but melting ice of the lower glacier, the only challenge is the incline. Of course, that makes our packs seem heavier than ever.

Towards the serac zone the rumble of occasional avalanches is distinctly unnerving, although they are tracking well to our left. Richard pauses for a moment to consider our best route.



GLACIAL RIVERS *are* DEEPER *in the* AFTERNOON *from* DAYTIME ICE MELT





Below the seracs on the Marconi Glacier

[*top*] Once above the glacier snout, the terrain becomes increasingly icy

Team setting out on trail alongside Rio Electrico from Piedre del Fraile campsite

The Rio Electrico runs beside La Playita wild camp



Ian looks down onto avalanche debris near to the serac zone on the Upper Marconi Glacier

"It's never been like this before," he says. "Usually it's just a straightforward snow ramp."

In front of us the landscape veers from a treacherous loose and scrabbly moraine-cum-moderate rock climb to our right, to an avalanching set of seracs to our left, with just a thin patch of névé between the two. Fortunately that appears to be reasonably protected from avalanche by a nearby serac wall.

Roped-up into two teams of four now, those at the back of the second rope are longest in the potential danger zone and it's definitely no place to hang around. The névé makes short work of the ascent: it's soft, but firm enough. A small rock barrier above the névé proves rather harder.

"Not so hard, Ian!" I shout. "You're pulling me off my feet!" With his enthusiastic hauling on the rope he was only trying to help, but that rock step is just something I need to do myself. Fortunately it's the crux of the glacier climb for me. Beyond, the snow is soft and loose in several places, with limited space for us all to bunch up together, but nothing really technical.

As we reach a larger exposed rock band I chat again with Kiersten.

"I want a picture of that," she says.

"What, the ice cave?" I reply. "Or the smaller avalanche tracks above it?"

"Nope, that... none of this was here four years ago when we were last here. It's all changed so much!" she says as she points to a rocky bowl, thinly lined with snow, and the crevassed blocky edge of the ice sheet dangling precipitously on the skyline.

We escape briefly from the rope to enjoy some gentle, grippy scrambling up the lovely sun-soaked striated rock to our right, and ponder the enormity of global warming having so much effect in four years. Or perhaps it's just that snowfall has been very poor since her last trip. Either way, conditions are not looking good for any sort of ice cap crossing.

Reaching the ice cap proper, we stop to enjoy the views. Team member Mick is particularly impressed; although he's well experienced in Scottish winter conditions, this is the first time he's seen such expansive mountain panoramas. But our day is not yet done. Staying well away from the immediate edges of the ice cap to avoid a heavily crevassed section, we round the



western flanks of Cerro Marconi Norte and then agree on our camp for the night, on a flatter section of ice just out of range of the funnelling effect of the Marconi Pass.

Now we have the art of Patagonian-style snow-wall building to master. Shovelling what feels like tonnes of snow is exhausting, even with a small previous wall to start us off. I'm glad when it's time to collapse into my sleeping bag. I'd been worried whether it really would be warm enough on the ice – but weighing less than 1kg and half the bulk of my normal winter bag, my PHD Hispar 500 turned out to be one of the best of many kit upgrades I'd had to sort to reduce the weight and bulk of my expedition pack. Then again, it is only just above freezing – rather than the -10C we had been expecting.

In the morning, Richard gathers us together for a team briefing. The snow conditions on the ice cap aren't good, the risk of crevasses and failing snow bridges is high and the forecast has changed. Instead of a well-earned rest day to enjoy the views and plan our ascent to Moreno, we need to move along the edge of the ice cap towards Circo de los Altares. Our high ascent plans are dashed.

But this gives us two options – a chance to go across the ice to Nunataks Viedma and Witte if conditions improve with a forecasted overnight cold snap in a day's time, or to escape quickly off the ice cap if conditions suddenly deteriorate.

One of the team, Clive, has brought a clever piece of kit with him – the 'turtle shells': two short sledges engineered together, which he's been carrying on his rucksack, and which now significantly lighten our loads. But the snow is so soft that travel is still arduous, and low cloud hinders Richard and Ian as they take turns to lead us into the whiteness. We even see a small crevasse on the way – a new experience for Richard and Kiersten on the 'usual route' – a corridor a few hundred metres in from the ice cap edge. Six and a half hours later we stagger to a halt. "The next waypoint's 200m over there" says Ian, staring at his GPS and still seeming as fit and full-of-beans as when he started in the morning. "The ready-made ice camp's right here!" say the rest of us.

And indeed there is – perhaps made by our friends from La Playita. Once again the walls need expanding to fit our four tents in, but this time a significant portion of the work has already been done for us. Having the strongest tent of the group (an apparently indestructible Vango Force 10 Vortex 200) gains us a dubious honour – the most exposed position on the wall-free edge of the camp.

In the morning the potential bad weather turns into little more than low cloud, drizzly rain and little wind – perfect for a well-earned rest day. It seems a shame to spend much of the time in our tents, but there are few other options, other than mending small wind-blown holes in our camp walls. I briefly try a stint outside, togged up in down jacket and sleeping bag on the Therm-a-Rest. It doesn't last long once drizzle recommences...



Circo de los Altares camp site – all four tents huddled together behind a snow wall





Natural meltwater drainage channel in the Upper Viedma Glacier

Team one roped up on the ice cap with pulka at the back of the rope – Nunatak Viedma in the background



Morning light over Circo de los Altares

Now the "low wind" weather window is closing on us, and our next weather update predicts an incoming storm two days ahead. Having encountered Patagonian storms before, Richard wisely suggests we should start our descent tomorrow, to be well below the Paso del Viento before that hits. After all, we're still at least three full days' hike away from El Chalten.

In the morning, both Richard and I wake early, hoping for a gorgeous pre-storm sunrise to light the mountains and ice cap up with a rose-hued Alpenglow. Sadly we're disappointed. Faint hints of pink in the clouds don't amount to anything more. Consolation comes a few hours later as the sun burns through the low cloud. And now we can see the majestic spiky peaks of Cerro Torre. I could stay there enjoying the views all day, but Richard is keen that we get moving now. He's right, of course. As we travel along the ice cap towards the Upper Viedma glacier, high level cloud rolls in, with lenticulars forming over Moreno. We really do have limited time to escape before the storm hits.

In the meantime, the interplay of cloud, snow and light across the ice cap makes for some awesome views. Mountains that are a full day's walk away appear to be just an hour's trek across the ice. Others, such as those lining the Upsala glacier, some two to four days' walk away, help the ice cap appear to stretch into infinity. We even see a tiny glacial island – a nunatak – its newly exposed peak emerging from the shrinking ice cap by the head of the Viedma Glacier.

We cross the Paso del Viento with minimal difficulty ahead of the wind. Awkward navigation briefly threatens our progress above Lago Toro, but Richard and Ian find a good way through the maze of glaciated canyons and rocky moraine. That evening, beside Lago Toro, the storm winds gather force. They howl around the camp site overnight, throw gravel through any hint of an open tent flap and challenge poorly weighted anchors. Once again we're very glad of our "heavyweight" expedition-strength tents.

The wind continues to rage the following day, adding extra challenge to the crossing of the Rio Toro. But at least it is blowing us in the right direction – towards our well-earned steaks and Malbecs in El Chalten!

As is sometimes the way with ambitious plans, we didn't achieve half of what we'd hoped. But simply being on the ice cap for those few short days was well worth the effort. As Mick later commented while looking back on the trip: "You know that thing about it being a once in a lifetime experience? Scrap that. I'm going back!!"

PRACTICALITIES

Guides: Should be booked well in advance. We went with Richard and Kiersten of Spanish Highs (*www.spanishhighs.co.uk*); several local guides are available in El Chalten.
Flights and transfers: Aerolineas Argentinas (Madrid via Buenos Aires to El Calafate) often gives good prices, but may require an overnight stop in Madrid to make connections (via low cost airlines). El Calafate airport is 2-3hrs transfer away from El Chalten. Advance booking is advisable for a large group (eg via *www.transportelaslengas.com/en/transfers*)
B&Bs: We stayed in the very comfortable Hosteria Confin Patagonico in El Chalten. Jorge and Claudia are very helpful and friendly and their post expedition asado (traditional barbecue) is a treat not to be missed!
Visas: not currently needed for UK citizens.
Ice cap/border formalities: Make sure you visit the registrar with the local Gendarmería Nacional in El Chalten before heading onto the ice cap (and across the technical border into Chile) for a migratory stamp to allow you to cross borders. On your return you must report your safe arrival and gain another official Argentina entry stamp. You must also register at the APN (Argentinan National Parks) offiec in El Chalten and inform them of your safe return.
Currency: US dollars are widely accepted, but change is given in Argentinian Pesos – which are very hard to exchange outside Argentina. An ATM exists in El Chalten, but often runs out of cash towards the end of the month.
Language: Spanish language skills are very useful.
Jabs: See *nathnac.net*

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Jon Sparks examines the sometimes fractious relationship between walkers and mountain bikers

TWO WHEELS



OR TWO FEET?

Sharing the trail: No friction here

AS I RATTLE DOWN the track on my bike, a walker ahead looks around and then breaks into a run. Fear? Panic, even? No, she's speeding up to get to the gate first and hold it open for me.

This isn't quite an everyday occurrence when I'm mountain biking, but friendly smiles and comments – if often of the 'rather you than me' variety – certainly are. However, I know that some walkers do have a problem with mountain bikers, and I have had a few unpleasantly memorable encounters over the years. It's always a shock, precisely because it's so rare.

The lack of antagonism I've experienced may be partly due to where I ride (mostly Lake District, Lancashire and Yorkshire Dales – the same places I go walking and climbing). Elsewhere in the country, there are some localised hotspots of poor relations, often in pressured areas close to centres of population. And nothing spoils a good walk, or ride, like an altercation.

So what can we do to avoid such confrontations? The answer surely has to lie in each of us respecting the countryside and the other people using it, and understanding each other's rights and responsibilities.

From walker to mountain biker

People have been taking bikes into the hills almost as long as bikes have existed: one Amos Sugden crossed Sty Head Pass with (though probably not on) a bike in 1890. A pass in the northern Berwyn range is still known – not only to cyclists – as 'The Wayfarer', after a snow-bound crossing in March 1919, immortalised by writer and off-road cycling pioneer Walter MacGregor Robinson (pen-name 'Wayfarer').

Around 60 years later, the first purpose-built (and so-called) mountain bikes appeared in California. Another 35 years on, and mountain bikes have spread across the world, technology has advanced by leaps and bounds and the discipline has expanded to encompass numerous niches and many varieties of bikers.

Mountain bikers are drawn to the countryside for many of the same reasons as walkers: fresh air, a sense of space, healthy exercise, scenery. Many are walkers too. I know lots of mountain bikers and few are monomaniacs: almost all go walking at times and many pursue other outdoor activities too (particularly rock climbing).

For me, mountain biking is a relatively recent addition to my outdoor interests, complementing and adding to the others. It offers another way of experiencing the outdoors, the higher average speed enabling me to range further and to move swiftly over tracks which might seem a bit long-winded at a walking pace.

As I learned skills and tackled more challenging trails, I found myself focusing on the intrinsic qualities of the trail itself. Negotiating tricky climbs or descents demands concentration (with potentially painful consequences for mistakes). Like rock climbing, this focused state of mind is exhilarating, and also seems to heighten awareness of other sights, sounds and scents when you do emerge, at the top of a climb or onto an easier trail.

This different perspective on the trails is part of the beauty of mountain biking. It also means that the trails I prefer to ride are often different from the ones I'd choose to walk. Mountain biking has led me to explore moors, forests and foothills which I might never have bothered with on foot.



Wet and muddy trails are more vulnerable to erosion – and also less fun to ride



Walking near Tilberthwaite, also a good area for mountain biking

The ground underfoot (and wheel)

When I first dabbled in mountain biking, the issue of erosion concerned me enough to demand investigation. I explored the evidence in depth for an article in another magazine, and again while preparing this one.

The broad picture is that mountain bikes in general (italics important) do no more damage than walking boots. Certain styles of riding, on certain terrain, can be more harmful: I cringe when mountain bike videos linger lovingly on slow-mo shots of wheels throwing up plumes of dust on dry Californian trails.

Conversely, there are circumstances where boots may do more damage than wheels. Bike and rider together are perhaps 20% heavier than a walker, but this weight is transmitted through two wheels rolling on fairly large contact-patches whereas sometimes, especially in descent, a walker's entire weight strikes with considerable impact-force through a small area at the heel. And of course, motorbikes, horses, and 4x4s (in ascending order) do significantly more harm than either – but again, these are generalisations. Differences between responsible and irresponsible users within groups may outweigh those between groups.

For mountain bikers, minimising our impact is down to both how we ride and where/when we ride. As Tom Hutton's *Lake District Mountain Bike Routes* guidebook, states: "Wet and muddy trails are more vulnerable… adjust your riding and consider using alternative trails where appropriate." Such trails are also harder work and less fun to ride.

Access and the law

Very rarely – but sometimes aggressively – I've been told "you can't ride here". As someone who makes his living from outdoor writing, I am careful about where I go, so I know that such claims are baseless. But in fairness, rights of way law (at least in England and Wales) is neither simple nor logical!

Current law recognises footpaths – legally open to pedestrians only – plus bridleways, restricted byways, and byways open to all traffic, all open to bikes and horses but totalling only 22% of the path network. Some people apparently believe that the categories can be distinguished by eye (i.e. narrow trail = footpath, wide trail = bridleway). Not so; the definition is solely about rights and is based on historic patterns of usage, taking no account of routes' current physical state, attractiveness or suitability for different users.

One proposed solution is to merge footpaths, bridleways and restricted byways into a single category, open to walkers, horses and bikes. Scotland (following the Swedish and Finnish model) has already gone further: bikes now enjoy the same freedom to roam as walkers. This option is now under consideration for Wales too.

There is an argument that opening up access for bikes could be beneficial to walkers. Confining bikes to less than a quarter of the Rights of Way network creates crowding, increasing risks of erosion and friction with other users. Freedom to select from the full range of available trails would allow bikers to gravitate to those which are most suitable and avoid those which are particularly popular with walkers.





[*above*] Trail centre trails can look pretty natural, especially given time to bed in. This is Leanachan Forest near Fort William; [*left*] A lone biker near Ambleside



Walkers and a mountain biker on the trail below Loughrigg

Sharing the trail

The law says that bikes on bridleways should give way to walkers and horses. But this can be difficult to implement in practice. Momentum is important to a mountain biker and if a cyclist is balked on a tricky climb, it may be impossible for them to get going again. On 'technical' descents, too, a modicum of speed usually helps in negotiating obstacles. By comparison, it is often easy for a walker to step aside for a moment. It's not an obligation but it will be appreciated.

Naturally, bikers should give fair warning if they are approaching walkers on a path. As Jacquie Budd – blogger, walker and mountain biker(and occasional *TGO* contributor!) – told me: "I probably have more awareness of bikes on the trail than many walkers, but if the wind is in the wrong direction or I'm chatting or caught up in my own thoughts I can be taken off guard by a bike coming up behind me." Understanding that bikes can appear almost silently, alarming unsuspecting walkers, she put a bell on her bike. I've done the same, and also found that it helps.

So next time you're out walking and you hear a 'brrrring!' think of it as a friendly gesture. The person on the bike could be wearing walking boots tomorrow.

British Cycling recently added guidelines on Mountain Bike Trail Etiquette to its website. With section headings including 'Leave no trace', 'Respect other trail users' and 'Respect Rights of Way' they cover very much the same ground we've covered in this article.

Momentum is important to a mountain biker. If a cyclist is balked on a tricky climb, it may be impossible to get going again



Descending to Torridon, with Beinn Alligin and part of Liathach behind. Most mountain bikers appreciate the great outdoors just as much as most walkers do [*left*] Coed-y-Brenin in mid-Wales, the original trail centre



TRAIL CENTRES

Pioneered in the 1990s at Coed-y-Brenin in Wales, trail centres feature dedicated, purpose-built trails, graded by difficulty. Now an integral part of mountain biking, they have brought jobs and income to many areas. Taken as a whole, the 7Stanes network in southern Scotland is one of Scotland's top 20 visitor attrac-tions.

The trail centre phenomenon does, however, raise a few questions. Do bikes-only (and often one-way) tracks create a wider expectation of priority? Does their purpose-built nature create a predictability that 'natural' trails lack? Do riders schooled in trail centres lack wider hill skills and awareness?

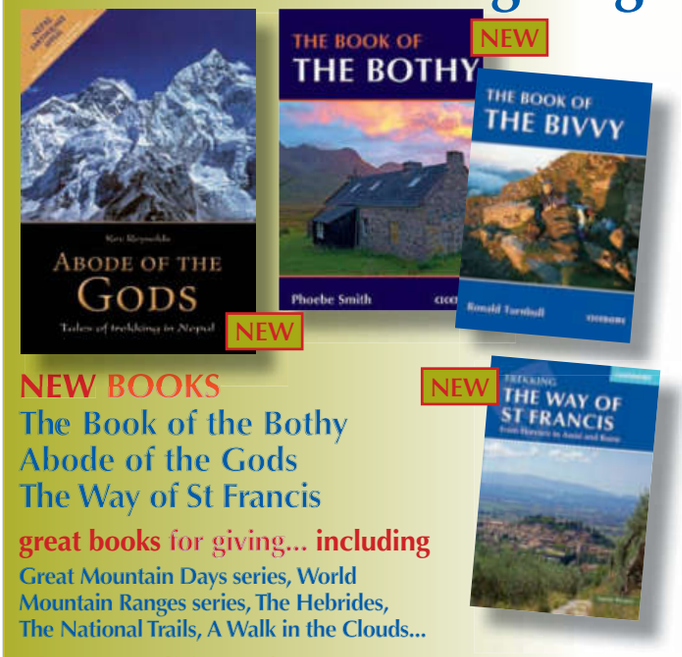
I'd love to know what *TGO* readers think. Send your thoughts to the editor or Tweet me at @jsparkphoto.



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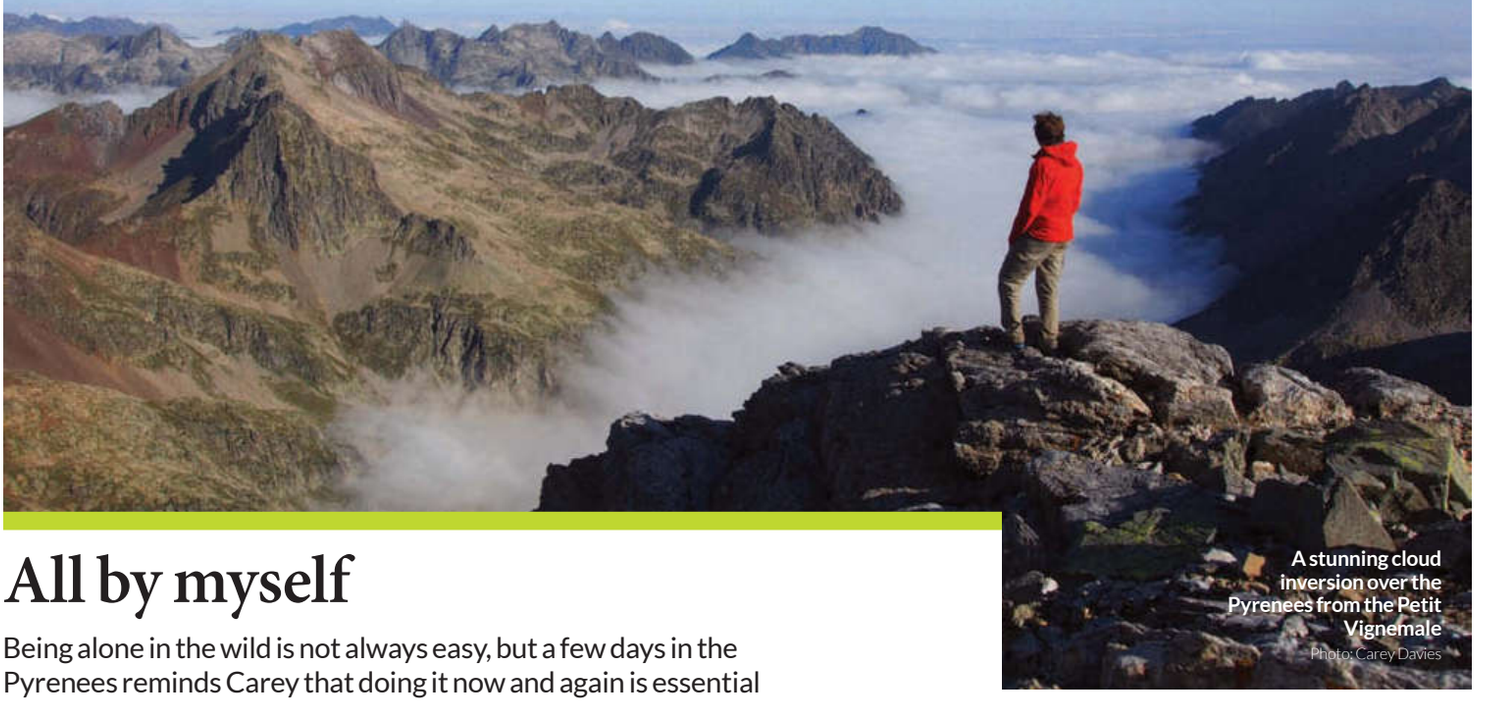
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Viewpoint

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A stunning cloud inversion over the Pyrenees from the Petit Vignemale
Photo: Carey Davies

All by myself

Being alone in the wild is not always easy, but a few days in the Pyrenees reminds Carey that doing it now and again is essential



Mountain magic

Carey Davies

Extraordinary moments in wild places

IT WASN'T YOUR typical 'holiday in the south of France'. The view in front of me was implacably grey, and it had just started hailing. A chorus of alpine choughs came through the mist like a bad omen, wheezy corvid sounds I imagined were warning me not to go on.

I was on the route of the GR10 in the Haute Pyrenees. The path had taken me into Spain for exactly an hour, but now I was back on French soil (more specifically, scree). It was a moody, mixed day, the cloud sinking, surging and swelling in a way that seemed silently ominous. The weather was affecting my spirits; with only myself for company, I felt despondent and downcast.

The burden of being alone in a wild place for an extended time, knowing you have only yourself for safety, company and conversation, represents more of a challenge for some than it does others. There is a breed of person who thinks nothing of weeks, even months, without human company; this magazine's extraordinary Chris Townsend seems to be a particularly hardy example. A young man called Josh recently joined my work after a sabbatical spent tackling various long-distance routes in Britain, which among other things included the Cape Wrath Trail, the unmarked 200-mile route through the great unpopulated expanses of the north-west Highlands. He walked it over five weeks, starting in February, entirely alone, at one point going three weeks conversing only with an old woman in a village shop. I thought about spending those 35 long (about 16 hours, to be exact) nights huddled in a tiny tent with the mean North Atlantic winter weather baying outside, and shuddered. I genuinely don't think I could manage that long without some levity, laughter or meaningful human interaction to enliven the endless evenings.

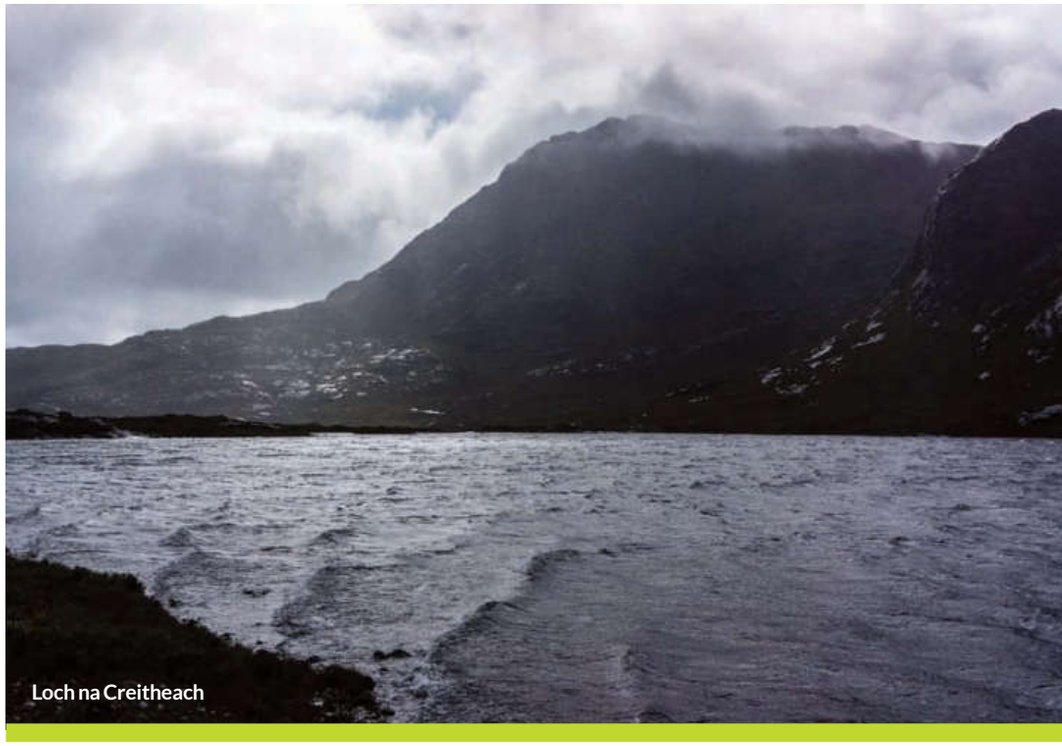
Outside the realm of 'outdoor enthusiasts', the idea of this amount of unaccompanied time leaves most people aghast. Our society's imperatives are almost all geared towards interaction with others. I once shared a house with a woman who couldn't walk to the shops alone for fear it represented some sort of social failure. I toyed with the idea of taking her to Knoydart as a sort of psychological experiment, but for some reason she wasn't very keen.

I'm not a herd animal, but then I'm not a committed loner either. I think I fall somewhere between these two poles. Life is too complicated to be either. The sense of space and shared purpose that walking provides makes it an unrivalled way to spend time with family and friends; it's a strange irony that the most high-quality human interaction happens in the middle of nowhere. On the other hand, being in the mountains alone gives an intensity of experience – good, bad, and ugly – that the presence of other people tends to smooth over. How many other times in life do we find ourselves having to entirely rely on our own resources for extended periods of time? How often is our internal dialogue allowed to go unmolested by an email, a Facebook notification or the insistent vibration of a call? Referring to data as 'the cloud' is not just a metaphor; wireless communication is literally in the air around us, like a kind of weather.

In the following days in the Pyrenees the sun emerged, treating me to life-affirming mountain sunrises and wall-to-wall cloud inversions. Eventually I reached that treasured meditative state you can only attain on your own, where you can almost shed your personality and all your mental preoccupations and walk outside yourself for a while; the moment described by the French writer Frederic Gros as when "you are only a body walking. Only that. You are nobody. You have no history. You have no identity. You have no past. You have no future. You are only a body walking." In other words, bliss.

Follow Carey on Twitter:
@carey_davies

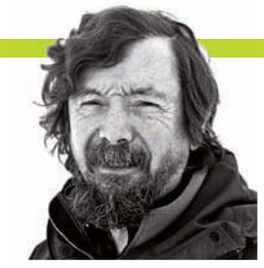
Photo: Chris Townsend



Loch na Creitheach

On Skye

Some days the hills don't call



Backpacking

Chris Townsend

TGO's Gear Editor and long-distance expert

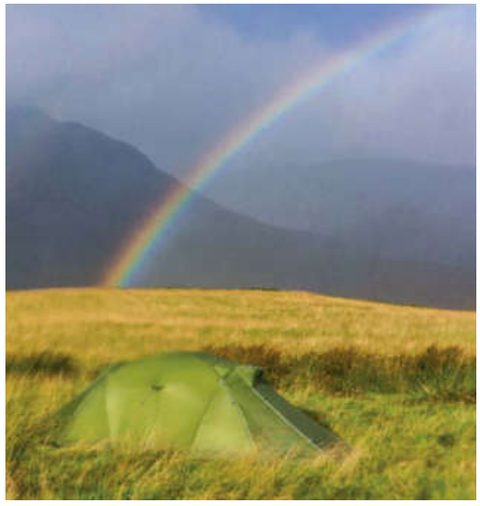
RAIN. WIND. LOW CLOUD. An inauspicious though not unusual start to a visit to the Isle of Skye, especially with a plan to climb Bla Bheinn, that fine wedge of rock rising 928m above the sea. Still, that was for tomorrow. This evening I was just walking over the 186m Am Mam pass and down to the sea and beautiful Camasunary Bay. A good if rocky track leads over Am Mam. Initially in the dusk I could just see enough to avoid the rocks and puddles but soon I needed my head lamp. This stopped me stumbling and slipping but didn't illuminate much as the light bounced back to me off the driving rain and drifting mist. Hood up, head down, I followed the beam of light through the black night.

At Camasunary a few weak spots of brightness indicated other campers. A cluster of tents were pitched outside the bothy and there were lights inside. I found a flat area in the great swathe of grassland that lies above the beach and pitched my tent, glad to dive inside out of the storm and pleased I'd brought a roomy and strong mountain tent, partly because the forecast was for high winds and partly because I knew I'd only be carrying it a few miles and I fancied the extra space. Both nights on this trip would be spent on this site.

By dawn the wind and rain were stronger, raging down the glen from the north and hammering the tent. The cloud base was only a few hundred metres above the sea. Sgurr na Stri, just 494m high, was invisible. This rugged little hill is a superb viewpoint and I had it in my mind as an alternative to Bla Bheinn if the weather made the latter unappealing. Today neither seemed a good idea. I had no enthusiasm for fighting my way through a storm to a wind-blasted, cloud-shrouded summit. I doubted I'd be able to stand on Bla Bheinn anyway, the wind down here was so fierce.

The storm brought back memories. Nearly 20 years before I'd climbed Bla Bheinn in similar conditions on my continuous round of the Munros and Tops, sloshing down Glen Sligachan and up and down the South Ridge without seeing anything much. Then I had a big walk to drive me on. This time I was free to go or not and the hills weren't calling me. Indeed, if there was any message from them in the storm it was 'don't even think about it!'

A day in the tent didn't appeal either so I wandered south along the shore to look at the new bothy, built last year but not yet open, as a replacement for the popular old one as the landowner wants this for his own use but didn't want to deprive people of a shelter. The stone-built new bothy is in a fine if muddy location, looking across the bay to Sgurr na Stri. I followed the coast path further as it climbed steep rocky slopes and traversed through little woods. To the south the faint outlines of the lower slopes of the islands of Rum and Eigg wavered grey against the surging sea and the surging sky.

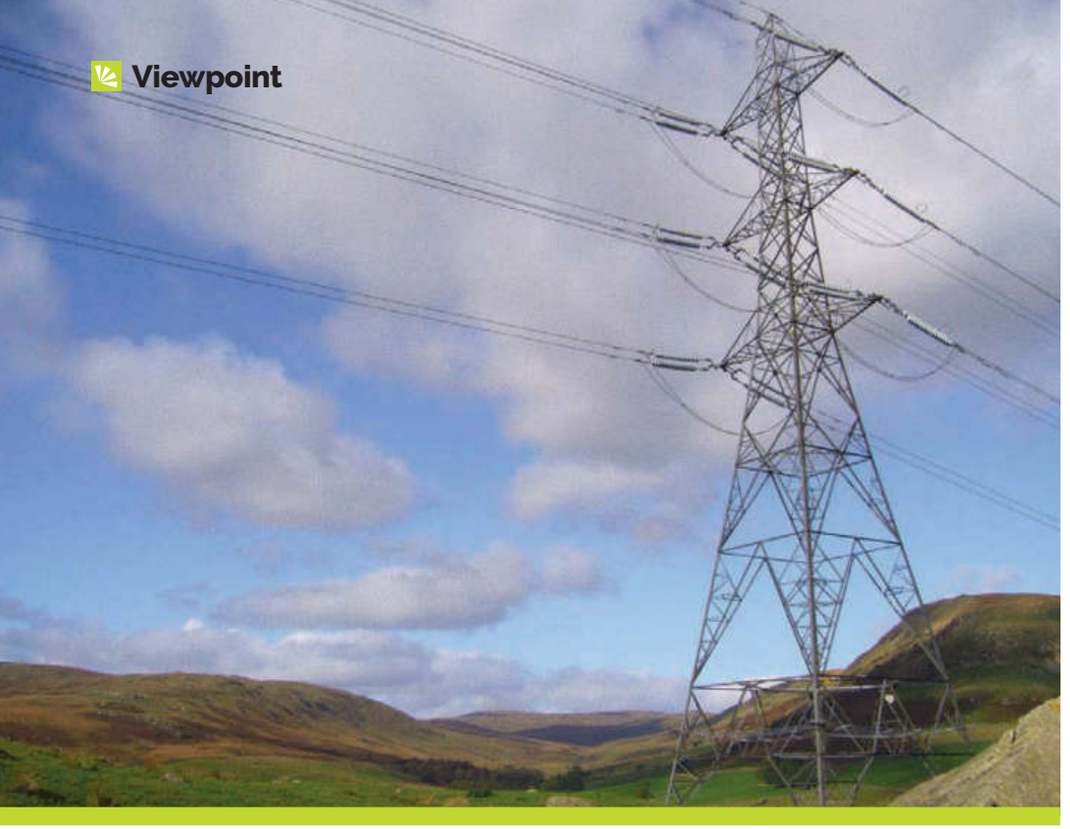


After returning to the tent for hot soup I went the other way, northwards and inland, to Loch na Creitheach, which fills the glen between Bla Bheinn and Sgurr Hain. The storm was driving white waves down the loch to crash upon the stony shore. Rain-soaked shiny slabs and crags rose into the cloud, dramatic and powerful. Touches of blue sky as the wind ripped the clouds apart only added to the feeling of a landscape in motion, a landscape where rocks, air and water all merged together.

In the evening rainbows appeared above camp, bright colours in the greyness. But the rain still lashed on.

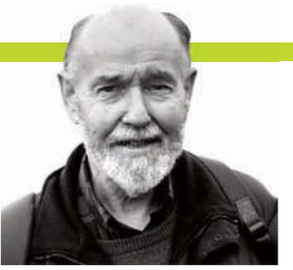
Another stormy night gave way to a calm morning. The clouds still hung low over the hills and the air was damp. With the wind gone the midges erupted and I was soon packed and heading back over Am Mam. It hadn't been a trip for the hills but it had still been exciting and enjoyable.

Follow Chris on Twitter: **@townsendoutdoor**



Green News

Roger provides a round-up of current environmental issues



Environment

Roger Smith

TGO's founding editor on the green issues that matter

THERE SEEMS TO BE quite a lot going on at the moment so I thought in this month's column I would round up a number of current green stories.

Pesky Pylons

Last November, the National Grid published a list of areas to benefit from a £500 million 'visual impact improvement' project which would involve removing electricity pylons and burying the cables underground. At the time it was thought that 65 pylons could be removed and eight possible areas were named. National Grid now say that the money will only be enough to remove 45 pylons and have dropped four of the areas.

Undergrounding is still planned for the New Forest, Peak District, Snowdonia and the AONB around Winterbourne Abbas in Dorset. The areas to lose out are the Brecon Beacons, High Weald, North Wessex Downs and Tamar Valley. At the same time National Grid have announced plans for 72 giant pylons 50 metres tall inside the Lake District National Park to connect a proposed new nuclear power station near Sellafield to the grid. Friends of the Lake District have sharply criticised these plans and say that a further 54 pylons would be prominently visible from within the park. They say it is "ridiculous" to underground cables in other areas while blighting our most popular National Park.

As the cost of undergrounding is to be borne by consumers (estimated cost 22p per year for each of us) should we not have a say? I'm sure many of us would contribute more than that quite happily to get more cables hidden and fewer pylons diminishing wild landscape.

Fractious Fracking

The award for acronym of the month goes to a group of Scottish National Party activists who are totally opposed to the extraction of shale oil and gas by fracking in Scotland. They have banded together under the name SMAUG, after the dragon in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* which is disturbed by "predatory dwarves digging for the treasures of its domain". The acronym isn't quite accurate as their full name is SNP Members Against Unconventional Oil and Gas which should be SMAUOG, but we'll let that pass.

The main issue is that fracking is getting totally different treatment north and south of the Border. The Westminster government are keen to press ahead with all speed, to the extent that they are threatening to cut back the time allowed for local authorities to consider fracking applications. These applications come with huge amounts of supporting documents, including environmental impact assessments which can be hundreds of pages long, and detailed study is necessary for a balanced decision to be made. Rushing things through is no way to proceed.

In Scotland there is currently a moratorium on fracking. SMAUG (and others) want an outright ban but industry insiders say they have had hints from the Scottish government that the moratorium could be relaxed before long. This is an area that affects a number of key walking areas and it ain't going to go away any time soon. Perhaps Smaug will welcome developers into his lair?

Sustrans Struggling?

I was surprised to hear Nick Crane fronting an appeal for funds on BBC Radio 4 recently. Surprised because the appeal came from Sustrans, who I have always seen as one of the most adept organisations in terms of securing funding for their superb cycle network routes (which are heavily used by walkers as well).

However, it turned out that the appeal was for funds for the maintenance of these routes, not their construction. This is something I wrote about a few months ago and it is an issue that needs to be urgently addressed. I have never understood why it is so much easier to obtain capital funding for new projects than ongoing money to maintain them, which is surely of at least equal importance. It is inconceivable that any part of the National Cycle Network should be allowed to fall into disrepair after two decades of successful development has been celebrated this year. I hope Nick's appeal was successful but even more, I hope that funding eligibility can be altered so that the appeal does not need to be repeated.

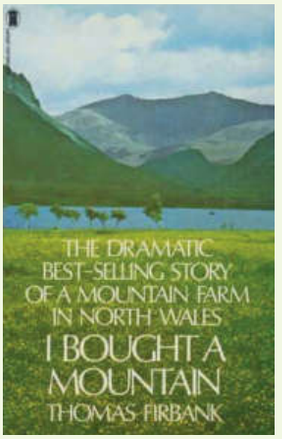
Red Flag Goes Green?

Finally, I'm sure you will have noticed that not only do we now have a Labour leader who is a teetotal vegetarian and goes to work on a bike, we also have a Shadow Environment Secretary who is a vegan with strong views about the countryside. Jeremy Corbyn and his team aren't going to gain power any time soon but I hope they take the opportunity to press the government hard on key issues.

In particular, I would love to see Kerry McCarthy putting the anaemic and ineffective Liz Truss under real pressure on environmental issues. Ms Truss has been notable only for inaction since she became Environment Secretary two years ago and it's high time she was called to account. There's certainly no shortage of issues. I've touched on three here and there are many more.

Go for it Kerry and let's see the dust on Liz Truss's desk well and truly blown away!





This month

I Bought a Mountain

Thomas Firbank

"The peaks rose around me, inscrutable of form. Peaks are feminine, wilful, sadistic. They accept homage and break the suitor."

This month's recommendation is hardly politically correct, but it is a Welsh mountain classic , says Jim



The Hillwalkers' Library

Jim Perrin

Literary recommendations for hillwalkers with a passion for the written word

THE MOUNTAIN AS "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" not a perception that ever troubled you? Nor me either. But then, the non-PC element in this month's choice is fascinating in itself. It's a book where the author's distinctly alpha male character (consider, for example, with what empathy he writes on prize Welsh Mountain rams in chapter XXII) is a principal element in its appeal. Not that his subject lacks allure for the ardent hill-goer. A regional classic, and an odd one at that, it's Thomas Firbank's *I Bought a Mountain*, which records the decade he spent in the hill-farming community of Snowdonia in the 1930s. I first read it when I was thirteen, 55 years ago, and hadn't revisited it until this week. Yet the scenes and stories remained just as vivid, graphic and clearly memorable as when first encountered. If you want a glimpse into the life of a community within sight of Snowdon as it was 80 years ago and to a very limited extent still is, here's your guide, to enrich your appreciation of lives led in these rough, exquisite hills where the vast proportion of my own years have been spent.

In 1931 Firbank – a 21-year-old of Welsh-Canadian parentage who had worked as a lumberjack in Quebec province for two years after leaving Stowe School – arrived at Dyffryn Mymbyr farm on the southern slopes of the Glyderau massif armed with a knowledge of sheep inherited from his mother's Berwyn farming stock and a £5,000 legacy. After memorably-described bargaining, he became owner of the place. If you've ever felt the remotest degree of antipathy towards hill sheep-farmers, this book will herd you back into the fold. Its comic portraits of shepherds, neighbours, auctioneers, dogs are deliciously alive, alert to every nuance of character, persuading you into affection. As someone who's worked with Welsh farmers, I can tell you that these sketches are abundantly true and insightful about the hardiest, funniest, most reticent and essentially kindly group of people I've known in my life.

It's not just about the people or the hill-sheep industry, exhaustively though both are covered. If it were, the interest for recreational hill-visitors would be marginal as Dyffryn Mymbyr is for agricultural purposes. Some of the best chapters in the book are about hillwalking and rock-climbing. There's an enthralling account of a successful 1938 attempt on the record time for the "Welsh 3,000s", which brought it down by two hours four minutes to eight hours 25 minutes. (This stood for many years and has now been almost halved – a feat of which I stand in awe, my own best time for this walk being nearly double Firbank's.) The chapter on rock-climbing gives a lucid account of the 1927 Giveen tragedy, the horror of which still resonates.

It's Firbank's style that captivates somehow. You could dismiss it as high-flown romanticism (except when it descends to ribald comedy). Yet the descriptive passages economically evoke some particular essence of the Welsh hill-scene in a manner that's rarely been bettered:

"Sometimes on misty days the yolk-coloured sun balances on the shoulder of [Moel] Siabod opposite. The vapour shrinks, till it lies in streaks which writhe upward, twisting like snakes."

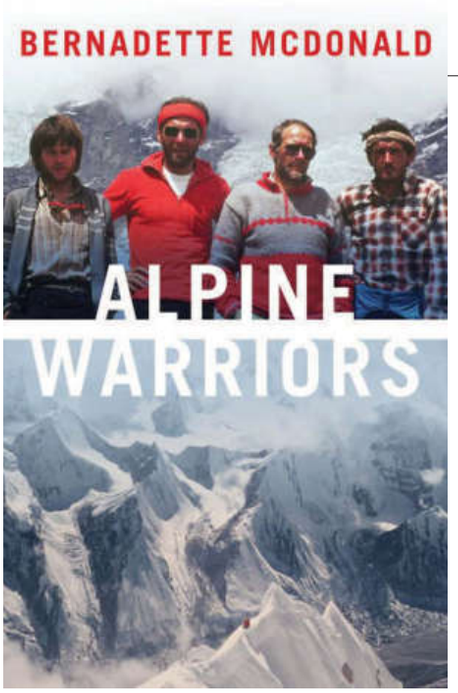
At other times he seeks to conjure up that misty, shape-shifting, supernatural sense with which the hills of Eryri are imbued:

"Dinas is a queer place, and queer events still happen there. I have camped in its dark, eerie hollow, and the night speaks."

Maybe these vague allusions are as close as you can get to identifying a crucial and defining element in the atmosphere of the Welsh mountains?

Thomas Firbank went on to become a soldier and war-hero, and wrote an account (*I Bought a Star*) of those experiences too, in which, again, that dichotomy – man of action, sensitive soul – is strongly present. You keep company with authors. Of Firbank's I'm always glad.

New book reviews



Alpine Warriors

Bernadette McDonald

Rocky Mountain Books, £18.60

AFTER THE GERMAN INVASION of Slovenia, then part of Yugoslavia, thousands of Slovenians were sent to Germany to endure concentration camps or to work in industry and agriculture. When the war ended they returned to ruin and a dictatorship under Tito. Life was not easy and trust was difficult. Out of all this devastation and despair generations of talented, highly motivated alpinists were born.

This book is their story. It is a tribute to their families, their strength and determination and their overpowering love for the mountains. It is a humbling and remarkable adventure. It is one of the great stories.

The author, Bernadette McDonald, begins with describing those Slovenian climbers who first travelled to the Himalayas in the 1960s, climbing Trisal II and IV in 1960, Kangbachen in 1965 and Annapurna II and IV in 1969. It was an era of siege expeditions involving large teams enduring long periods in the mountains. She then tells of the great climbers in the decades that followed and the outstanding ascents they achieved. During a 20-year period between 1975 and 1995 Slovenian climbers reached the summits of all 14 of the 8,000-metre peaks, many by new, demanding routes. This was surely an outstanding achievement. Their lives have been thoroughly researched and their passionate relationship with the Himalayas revealed. In particular, it provides a sensitive portrayal of one of Slovenia's greatest, hardiest of climbers, Necj Zaplotnik.

In 1983 a team including Zaplotnik went to Manaslu, gathered there to celebrate his 31st birthday. A few days later a huge serac broke away from the mountain between Camp I and Camp II. Two climbers were killed; one of those was the indestructible Zaplotnik. The Slovenian climbing world had lost a treasured father

For Alpine Warriors, Bernadette drew heavily upon the legend's own writing to gain her inspiration. His thoughts and reflections in his book, *Pot* (*The Way*) gave her direction, and an understanding of how Slovenian climbers were made and what they wanted from their special times in the mountains. And she refers to some of his most magnificent of lines: *"I am sentenced to freedom, so free that, among the crowd of people who love me, as well as those who don't care for me, I continue to be alone. Alone with my wishes, dreams, desires; alone on my endless path."* It was Zaplotnik who inspired McDonald enough to put in the seemingly endless research and translation needed to produce such a richly written text.

It is a challenging read, but ultimately offers a captivating examination of a little-known story in mountaineering history

Alpine Warriors is a challenging read, but it ultimately offers a thoroughly captivating examination of a relatively little-known story in mountaineering history. A giant was born out of adversity. Today, young Slovenian climbers are supported by what McDonald describes as a "knowledge bridge". It has the strongest foundations and many mighty climbers have crossed it. It stands as a monument to the fallen but it will encourage many generations to cross and live a life in the precious mountains of the world. The climbers change, the climbing evolves but ambition endures forever.

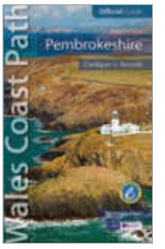
Noel Dawson

Book round-up

Wales Coast Path: Pembrokeshire (Cardigan to Amroth)

Vivienne Crow

Northern Eye Books, £13.99

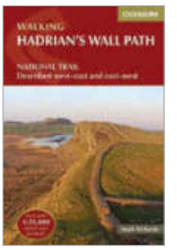


Part five in a series of seven official guides to the Wales Coast Path. Vivienne Crow – a regular contributor to *The Great Outdoors* – presents the Pembrokeshire section, breaking down the 299km National Trail into 14 parts ranging from 14-25km in length. The (just about) pocket-size guide includes OS mapping, route directions and an interpretation of points of interest along the way.

Hadrian's Wall Path

Mark Richards

Cicerone, £14.95



The popular 135km National Trail typically takes a week to walk, but it's been presented in this guide in a more leisurely 10-stage format with suggestions for five and eight-day itineraries. It is described both west-east and east-west and comes with a 1:25,000 OS route map booklet.

The Beara & Sheep's Head Peninsulas; The Dingle Peninsula; Killarney to Valentia Island: The Iveragh Peninsula

Adrian Hendroff

Collins Press, €11.99 each



Three guides detailing walks on the south-west of Ireland's peninsulas. Each book contains more than 25 walks that can be completed in a day. Route directions are given, along with reference to points of interest and local history. The walks are also graded in difficulty. There are no maps, only diagrams, but coordinates are included in the directions.

Readers' page

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Share your views, your experiences and your favourite photos

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Please include a phone number and postal address.
Letters may be edited for clarity or to fit the space available.

Faroe Island adventures

I enjoyed Craig Weldon's article on the Faroe Islands in the October issue. Sornfelli can in fact also be climbed from the north via a smaller mountain. I walked there from Torshavn four years ago. The northern approach involved a scramble to the summit on which there is a radar station (with a web cam on it). The only way I could find down is via a long steel curved ladder, then you can follow the road back to Torshavn. Be warned: the ladder is long and quite scary without via ferrata-type equipment. There's also a sign saying that the summit is off limits to the public and the area has some connection with the Faroes' commando regiment (bit late if you have made the summit via another route!). The weather is very volatile and getting lost in the mountains would possibly result in death as they are all very steep, much steeper than England or Scotland.

Kevan B. Hubbard

Trainers on the Trail

I read Alex Roddie's account of his expedition on the Cape Wrath Trail (October issue) with some misgivings. He wore trainers and used a 'tent' which would have been more at home on a British beach in summer. Having disclaimed the inadequacy of his kit in the opening lines, and having survived a storm and the bogs of Knoydart, he never returns to reflect on whether he was foolhardy to attempt this route thus equipped. He even says that with hindsight he could have cut another kilo (2.2lbs) from his pack weight!

Having experienced sections of the Cape Wrath Trail and having completed several TGO Challenge events, my concern is that inexperienced newcomers to the real wilderness of the Scottish Highlands, at any time of the year, may be encouraged to set out lightweight but ill-prepared for the conditions they will encounter. If you are not able to carry the weight of suitable kit, you have not done enough conditioning and you should be mindful of taking on realistic daily mileages. Eighteen miles in this country is a long, long way.

John Dodwell

Eagles and dragonflies

I don't know if you used the wrong picture for the caption or if it's misidentified, but the dragonfly in the picture used alongside Karen Lloyd's *England's Last Golden Eagle* (October 2015) is a golden-ringed dragonfly, not a southern hawker as stated.

David Hasell

Social Media

Make sure to keep us updated with what you've been up to in the hills. You can share your shots with us on our Facebook page and on Twitter using @TGOMagazine. We're also on Instagram – tag your shots with #TGO #TheGreatOutdoors and we'll share them!

Alfie and Rufus on Red Pike, Buttermere.
@camllahurst





Good read by @alex_roddie in this month's @TGOMagazine on Cape Wrath Trail!
@SteveFallon



Rough camping just below Pen-y-Fan last night.
@steve4319

In pursuit of "our" eagle

Thank you Karen Lloyd for your article *England's Last Golden Eagle* in the October issue of *The Great Outdoors*. Although not a resident of Cumbria, I've walked and camped there many times. I've walked and camped in many other places too: I've seen whales breach the seas off the coast of Iceland, had close encounters with griffon vultures in remote Pyrenean gorges, and camped in Yosemite with its large bear population. But, as an Englishman (forgive me for any jingoistic undertones) I have never seen 'our' golden eagle in Riggindale, even despite futile efforts to camp there specifically to see him. The outlook is not good for the reasons you state. I too spoke with the RSPB, and was informed that if a female did cross the border, apparently the courting process takes time – and maybe time is not what our eagle has?

James Keen

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Hill Skills

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The Great Outdoors GUIDE

SCRAMBLING



Photo: JohnChivall

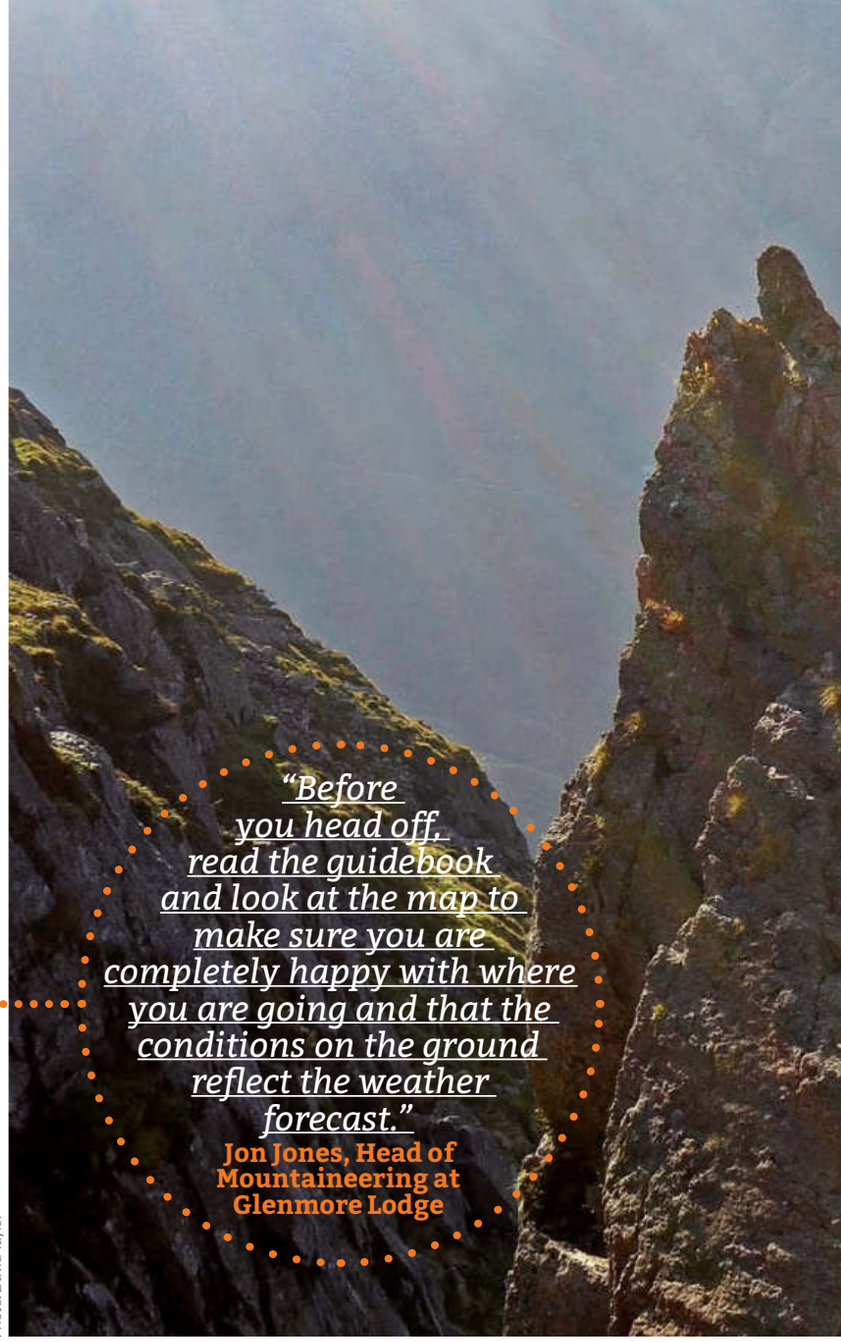
What is scrambling?

Most hillwalkers with a decent array of days out under their hipbelts will have a good idea of what scrambling's all about – the experience of moving over terrain that's steep enough and exposed enough that you find yourself using your hands as well as your feet. But definitions can be as wobbly as a novice on Sharp Edge. While the inclusion of a route in a scrambling guidebook is generally a pretty good indicator that you're entering scrambling terrain, there are some Grade 1 scrambles that the more confident and competent among us can walk along virtually with their hands in their pockets. Then, at the other end of the spectrum, there are Grade 3 routes that are certainly exposed and challenging enough to be classed as rock climbing.

"I've done guided scrambles that have been terrifying in comparison to easy rock climbs," says Ian Sherrington, Chief Instructor at Glenmore Lodge. "You go to scramble not expecting to need a large rack of equipment and a partner who is very competent in rope work techniques. If you're unlucky – because the route hasn't been climbed for a long time or you get it out of condition; or if you stray slightly off-route – you can get into really serious ground very quickly on some of those top-end scrambles, and end up on terrain that feels more serious than on a simple rock climb."

Of course, it doesn't actually matter how you label what you're doing – whether it's a walk, a scramble or a climb – what matters is that you have an enjoyable and safe day out and are prepared for the terrain and conditions you encounter. Over the next few pages we'll give you a few tips to point you in the right direction.

Glenmore Lodge mountaineering department offers courses in scrambling, climbing, mountaineering, walking and navigation. For further information visit www.glenmorelodge.org.uk or call 01479 861 256.



"Before you head off, read the guidebook and look at the map to make sure you are completely happy with where you are going and that the conditions on the ground reflect the weather forecast."

Jon Jones, Head of Mountaineering at Glenmore Lodge

Photo: David Taylor

Scrambling grades

1

Essentially an exposed walking route that will require you to use your hands in parts. Route-finding is unlikely to be very challenging. Most experienced hillwalkers will not encounter too much difficulty on Grade 1 scrambles and they are usually in areas where it is possible to escape onto easier ground if necessary.

2

Expect to find yourself using your hands more frequently. Route choice will be more challenging. Many people will prefer to use a rope for protection on Grade 2 scrambles.There are likely to be fewer ledges than on a Grade 1 route and not as many options for escaping onto easier ground. The route might be longer too, and you can also expect to encounter more serious exposure.

3

Expect to find yourself using some rock-climbing skills, including the use of rope, placing of protection and belaying. Route-finding may be difficult, the exposure can be fairly daunting and if you do find yourself in difficulty, the only means of retreating may be via an abseil. Often Grade 3 scrambles will also appear in climbing guidebooks, classed as 'Moderate' (the easiest climbing grade).
You may also find routes graded 3(S) which refers to particularly serious grade 3 routes, or even Grade 4 (which is used in Brian Evans' Cicerone guides to scrambling in the Lake District).

Star Ratings

★
Interesting but not exceptional

★★
Enjoyable and interesting scrambling

★★★
A classic scrambling route



"The best scrambles take you to unspoilt, remote places that you can't get to simply by walking."
Tom Livingstone, Outdoor Instructor

Seven tips to help you find your way along a scramble

1. The lower the grade, the easier route-finding is likely to be. 'Classic' three-star routes are also likely to be easier to follow.
2. Do a quick search for any initial knowledge –ask at your local climbing shop, go onto the blogs, see if you can find some up-to-date information about the route.
3. Plan a walk-in that allows you to check out the scramble from the approach
4. Don't move in on the scramble without taking the time to plan your route from below. Ideally, try to get into a position where you can see all the way to the top and look at the features along the route.
5. If you are with someone with more experience, allow them to go first.
6. Watch out for clues that the route is well travelled – polished rock, footprints on ledges and areas where it looks like potential anchors have been cleaned-up.
7. If you find yourself in a position where you're not very confident about progress, consider at every step upwards whether you can get back down. If not, go back down while you can.

Footwork

*Two approaches to help you scramble securely, from **Ryan Simpson** at Horizon Expeditions*

Try to use the inside front edge of your boot to stand on footholds. This will enable you to stay in balance, and is less likely to slip off the hold.



For smaller holds, try to center your big toe on them. This is the "power point" of your foot and will be better placed to push yourself upwards.



Your mountain apprenticeship

Like any practical activity, scrambling is best learned in a face-to-face environment alongside somebody with more experience. At Glenmore Lodge, Scotland's National Outdoor Training Centre, Chief Instructor Ian Sherrington recommends that hillwalkers enter into what he calls a 'mountain apprenticeship', in order to acquire the relevant skills over a period of time. "Whether you're going with friends, whether you're part of a club, whether you take a guide, whether you go on a course, what you're looking for there somewhere is a kind of trusted mentor that will help you through the experience," he says. "I think that is by far the best way to learn in an area that requires a lot of judgement."

Putting yourself through a mountain apprenticeship isn't just for those who have ambitions to summit the Inaccessible Pinnacle – anyone who wishes to become a more competent hillwalker could benefit from learning scrambling skills from an expert or more experienced friend. Ian suggests that you profile the skills you need to be a good scrambler – if you're a confident hillwalker then your navigation and movement skills may well be solid, and you'll probably have a head for heights, but you might need more experience to understand how to interpret scrambling guidebooks and, in particular, to learn the rope-work techniques that are needed to protect yourself and your scrambling partners. Look at where there are gaps in your skill-set and concentrate on developing that area. Then, when you've completed your route or are sitting in the pub after your day out with your mentor, talk through what you've learned and what you still need to do.

So what else can you do to make the most of the opportunity when scrambling alongside a more experienced mentor? "Err on the side of safety, be cautious, allow time in your day so that you have time to learn during the experience, and have discussions if necessary," suggests Ian, adding: "Go on days where the conditions are favourable – dry with good visibility and low winds – and maybe go to the place that is generally familiar to you, so you don't have to navigate in and navigate out. Scrambling in areas that you're familiar with as a walker will give you a lot of confidence."

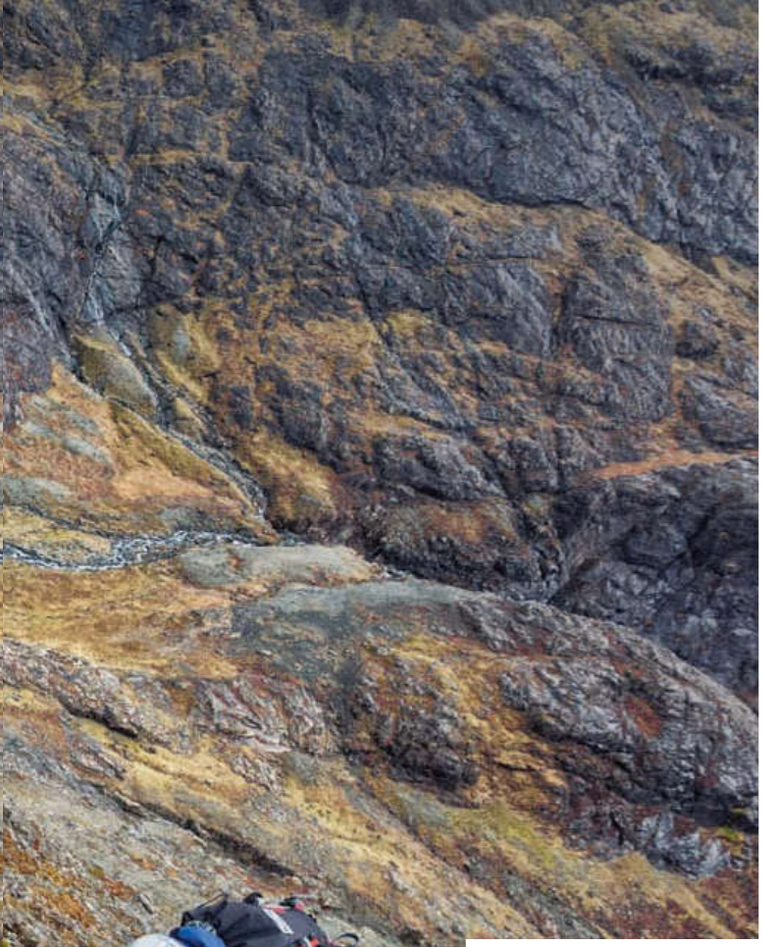
Photo: Glenmore Lodge



Photo: Guy Prince

Staying safe

1. As a general rule, don't climb up what you can't climb down.
2. Scrambling routes often follow natural weaknesses which collect loose rock – so watch out.
3. Consider wearing a helmet on routes that might funnel falling debris.
4. On steeper terrain do not stand below other people; stay to the side until others have passed the obstacle.
5. Aim to scramble in favourable weather conditions – when it's dry, with good visibility and little wind.
6. Always be prepared to modify your plans. Having a plan B before you set off will make this easier.



What to wear, what to carry

Scrambling will often form the crux of a day's hillwalking. As such, you'll want to carry the same kit you would take for any mountain day: waterproofs, extra layers, etc. Consider your choice of footwear, because very flexible soles can provide less security than stiffer boots, particularly on wet rock. If you're planning a very easy Grade 1 scramble you might not need anything else. But for more technical scrambling, you'll want to pack a helmet, a rope and protective gear, and perhaps lightweight climbing harnesses. A few examples are pictured here – including nuts, slings and quickdraws (check out the July 2015 issue of the magazine or the website at www.tgomagazine.co.uk for reviews). The best way to learn to use this stuff is face-to-face so consider signing up for a course if you don't have a more experienced friend to show you the ropes (and the harness, and the nuts...).

"It's worth considering a pair of gloves that are suitable for handling the rope, and provide a good grip. There are some excellent ones on the market with a leather palm. Watch out for certain types though as they are virtually impossible to get on over wet hands and are consequently a waste of time in the UK."

Mal Creasey, Development Officer for Mountain Training England



Photo: Kirk Watson

Glossary: Selected terms used in scrambling

Abseil: To descend using a rope that's secured above you. In a 'classic abseil' the rope is secured around your body; or you could use a dedicated abseil device or belay device to feed the rope through.
Anchor: A rock feature or tree, or a piece of climbing gear placed in a crack in the rock, forming a solid attachment point.
Belaying: Protecting a roped climber by safeguarding their rope, which is often secured to an anchor.
Cam: A spring-loaded protection device.
Hex: A hexagonal nut attached to a wire or tape loop, which is inserted into cracks in rock for protection.
Hold: A natural rock feature that you can place your hands or feet on and use to progress along the scramble.
Karabiner: A metal ring with a spring-loaded gate, used to connect pieces of gear together.
Leader: The person in front on the route, usually the most experienced.
Nut: A metal wedge attached to a loop of wire, which is inserted into cracks in the rock.
Protection: Gear used for arresting falls.
Sling: A loop of strong webbing.
Spike: A large boulder or protrusion of rock, used as an anchor.
Spotting: Standing below another person in order to support them if they fall.
Thread: The point where two large boulders rest against each other, used as an anchor when a rope or sling is threaded through the gap.

Belaying for scrambling

Ticked off the easy low-grade classics and want to take your scrambling skills up a notch? It's time to start thinking about rope-work. Here we take you through the basics of belaying, with information from the BMC and Mountain Training

Using ropes to protect your scrambles can often be complex, and making good judgements about what is required takes expertise and experience. The information below gives you a quick insight into some different belay methods you can use, but it shouldn't be treated as a guide. The best way of getting this knowledge is face-to-face, by either learning from an instructor or taking a course in scrambling at a centre like Plas y Brenin or Glenmore Lodge. See the links below for more resources and information.

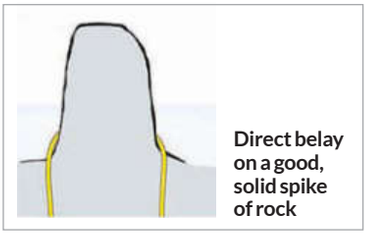
Belaying – different options

Belaying is the use of a rope to protect a climber from the consequences of a slip. When encountering tricky sections of a scramble, it may be safest for the first person up to belay the rest of the party from above, to allow them to reach the next safe place. Good judgement is required as to when this would be appropriate, but generally when scrambling the more confident and experienced person would climb the section first, either without protection and not being belayed, or being belayed from below and placing gear as a rock climber would. On reaching a ledge they would prepare to belay the others up to them using one of the techniques described below.

Belaying techniques should be thoroughly practised somewhere safe before being used, as the consequences of a mistake could be extremely serious. It is important with all of these methods that the rope is kept tight as the scrambler below ascends. If slack rope is allowed to build up then they could fall a long way before the rope goes tight, putting sudden large forces on the belayer, the climber and the anchors.

• Direct belay around rock

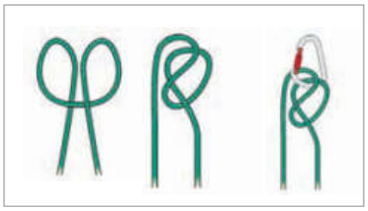
Running the rope directly around a solid anchor, normally a rock spike or block which must be bombproof and shaped appropriately to hold the rope without it slipping off or riding up. The belayer takes in the rope around the anchor; friction created by the rope enables the belayer to hold a slip.



Direct belay on a good, solid spike of rock

• Direct belay with an Italian Hitch

If an anchor is not suitable to accommodate the rope alone it may be possible to place a sling around it instead. This provides a direct belay by adding a HMS screwgate karabiner with an Italian Hitch. This is only appropriate if the anchor is bombproof, as it will take the whole load of a fall.



• Indirect belay

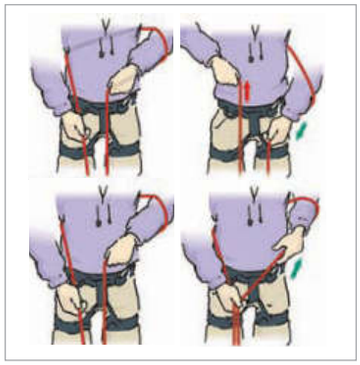
This may be necessary if the anchors are not good enough to take a direct loading. The belayer ties on and belays from the central rope loop at the harness using an Italian Hitch or belay device as they would in a rock climbing situation.

• Braced stance (hand over hand)

This method allows you to hold a minor slip and prevent a fall, but only if the rope is held securely with no slack in the system at all. The belayer stands with one foot forward or sits with feet braced against something solid. The hands grab the rope alternately and kink the rope, maintaining a constant tension and tight rope to the second. Careful judgement is required with this technique, as the consequences of it failing are potentially disastrous.

• Braced sitting stance (waist belay)

This is essentially the same as the above, but in a sitting stance with the rope running across the ground to create friction, which makes holding a slip easier. A waist belay ensures a firm grip on the rope and incorporates body weight too, with the feet braced against something solid. This is more secure than a braced stance but still requires careful judgement.



[*Clockwise, from top left*]
1.Start position: The rope is flicked over the head to sit around the waist. The live hand is forward and the brake hand is twisted around the dead rope just in front of the waist.
2.Slack is taken in with a pull-push motion, the live hand pulls back and the brake hand pushes forward.
3.The live hand slides down the rope and pinches the dead rope in front of the brake hand enabling the dead hand to slide back up to the waist.
4.The live hand releases its pinch on the dead rope and both hands are back to the start position.



More information



'Rock climbing' book

The above information has been taken from '*Rock Climbing: Essential Skills and Techniques*', the official Mountain Training handbook, by Libby Peters. Order it from the BMC shop in 'Climbing and Mountaineering' > 'Technique and Skills': www.bmcshop.co.uk

Instructors and courses

There are hundreds of Mountaineering Instructors and Guides across Britain who can literally show you the ropes when it comes to scrambling. Use the Mountain Training website to find one near you: *www.mountain-training.org/find/find-a-leader* – look for somebody who holds the Mountaineering Instructor Award (MIA) or the Mountaineering Instructor Certificate (MIC), or who is a IFGMA-affiliated British Mountain Guide.

The BMC's two-day 'Scrambling Essentials' courses are run through Plas y Brenin in Snowdonia and are subsidised by Sport England, so you pay less. Check them out here: *www.thebmc.co.uk/scrambling-essentials*



Photo: Glenmore Lodge

Want to see belaying techniques in action? Watch a five-part series on scrambling ropework made by the BMC, DMM and the Association of Mountaineering Instructors on the BMC website here: *www.thebmc.co.uk/ropework-for-scrambling*

Getting out of trouble

If you find yourself stuck on a scramble and unconfident about persevering, here are a few tips:

1. Talk to each other first, to consider your best course of action. Don't fall into a 'heuristic trap' (p72) by leaving responsibility to others in the party.
2. If you are much nearer the top of your route to the bottom, continuing upwards may be safer than attempting multiple abseils to get down.
3. Can you get around the problem – is there an alternative route a bit further along?
4. Consider calling a more experienced friend who knows the route or the area and getting advice from down on the ground. You could even get advice from the local rescue team.
5. If you are genuinely stuck and need to be rescued then make yourself as warm, secure and visible as possible – make the phone call, wear bright colours and use a whistle if you have one.

Heuristic traps

In challenging situations, people often take shortcuts in their decision-making, relying on simple rules of thumb or 'heuristics', rather than thinking through the options and consequences thoroughly. This can be a dangerous approach out on the hill. Heuristic traps are often discussed in relation to avalanche safety but here Ian Sherrington from Glenmore Lodge explains how they can also apply in scrambling. The commonly used mnemonic is 'facets':

Familiarity
"If it's pouring with rain, don't automatically think 'I've done Striding Edge before, let's go and do that again'. It'll be very different on a wet day. Just because you've done something before, you can't assume it's safe. Always think: is it a good time for this particular day out?"

Acceptance
"Acceptance is where someone is suppressing their own concerns and accepting the 'groupthink', rather than raising their voice. If you just keep pushing on without good reason to and without good justification, then you could get caught out."

Commitment
"This is all about having a Plan A and no Plan B. If your plan is to do Striding Edge, what will you do if you get up there and it's windy, rainy and the group starts to get a bit nervous? If they haven't considered alternative options at the planning stage then people often just push on."

Expert Halo
"Overly trusting the 'expert' is a potential trap. Whilst belief in your leader is important it's also healthy that everyone is engaged in the decision making and that means staying alert and asking questions."

Tracks (or Scarcity)
"The term tracks is taken from the skiing world and is meant to conjure images of skiers racing for off-piste lines not thinking about the avalanche risk. To make good decisions we need to take our time. What we shouldn't be doing is racing up a route, focusing on trying to overtake other people. That's not for us in the learning phase at all."

Social Proof
"The last one is Social Proof – following people blindly. If you are following someone on a scramble and they seem to choose an unsafe or more difficult option, don't just go the same way because that's the way they went. Think it through and make your own decisions."



"It is worthwhile knowing a little about rock types, as some – like schists and granite slabs – will be badly affected by rain and should be avoided unless you know for sure you're in for a dry day. Gabbros, coarse sandstones and grained granites will be less affected."

Mountaineering instructor and TGO gear reviewer Kirk Watson

Photo: Dougie Cunningham



Photo: Ryan Simpson

Learn from the climbers

Higher graded scrambling has much in common with rock climbing, and the two activities often overlap. For that reason, if you want to move into the more challenging end of scrambling, Ian Sherrington at Glenmore Lodge recommends you consider hanging out with climbers for a while. Joining a climbing club or going on a climbing course will give you exposure to the crucial rope-work skills needed to protect a difficult scramble. But it'll also help you get acquainted with a craggier environment.

"If you've come from a hillwalking background, then route-finding on rocky terrain can be a massive challenge," says Ian. "There are some classic scrambles that make their way through crag-like terrain in incredibly airy places. If you were a hillwalker and found yourself out here with minimum big-crag experience, you could feel lost and afraid very quickly."

The rope-work skills used in scrambling – choosing anchors, tying knots, using a harness, slings and karabiners – can be daunting to someone with little experience. Again, acquiring a little more information than you might actually need can be a great way of gaining confidence. "Go and be guided on some basic rock climbing and then come back and look at the absolute basics," suggests Ian. "Every time someone goes off scrambling, they decide on the amount of kit they're going to take and the style they're going to climb in – that's an easy decision for a climber to make; it's a really hard decision for somebody to make who doesn't have a lot of rope-work skills."



Curved Ridge on Buachaille Etive Mor is a Grade 3 scramble

Classic scrambles
Grades 1-3

1

North Ridge of Tryfan
Snowdonia

Crib Goch
Snowdonia

Sharp Edge & Halls Fell Ridge, Blencathra
Lake District

Jack's Rake, Pavey Ark
Lake District

Carn Mor Dearg Arête
Ben Nevis

2

Aonach Eagach
Glen Coe

Liathach's Am Fasarinen Pinnacles
Torridon

Wistow Crags, Pillar
Lake District

Eagle's Nest Gully and Arrowhead Ridge, Great Gable
Lake District

Forcan Ridge
Kintail

3

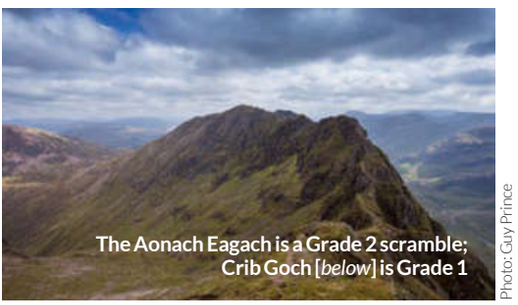
Curved Ridge, Buachaille Etive Mor
Glen Coe

Pinnacle Ridge, St Sunday Crag
Lake District

Kinder Downfall
Peak District

Sentries Ridge, Mynydd Mawr
Snowdonia

An Teallach traverse
Great Wilderness



The Aonach Eagach is a Grade 2 scramble; Crib Goch [*below*] is Grade 1

Photo: Guy Prince



Photo: Ray Wood

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www.altberg.co.uk

The Great Outdoors

LOSE

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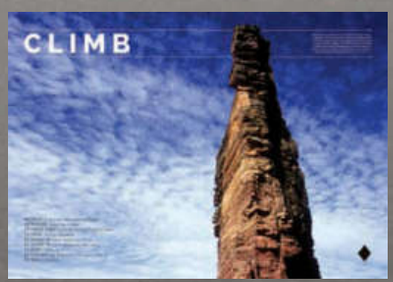
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Gear



Best of the tests: gloves p88

76 New gear 78 Mid layers 84 Softshell trousers 88 Best of the tests

New gear



Bergans
Airojohka Jacket
This 400g technical jacket uses a three-layer waterproof system of polyester fabric and Bergans' own Dermizax NX, a technology that the brand claims has a wicking ability that is "twice as high as traditional membranes." The front pockets are mesh to add extra breathability and they're long enough to allow access while wearing a hipbelt or harness. The back is extended and the collar comes up high for storm protection. It's available in a range of sizes and colours for both men and women.
cotswoldoutdoor.com

Hi-Gear
Packlite Down Jacket
700 fill power down underneath a polyamide outer with a Durable Water Repellent finish and it packs into its own pocket. This jacket is part of a new range of down insulated mid layers for both men and women that's being distributed by Go Outdoors. Each top comes in two colour options and in multiple sizes.
gooutdoors.co.uk





Berghaus
High Trails Jacket
This four-season jacket for men uses an updated version of Berghaus's Hydroshell waterproof technology. It's the first time that the waterproofing has been used in a three-layer system, combined with a new fabric called 3L Hydroshell Elite Pro. The jacket has a more traditional look in comparison to the other options in the Hydroshell range, with a long cut that comes down far below the waist. Features include a peaked hood, two zipped chest pockets and hand warmers, plus body venting.
berghaus.com



Alpkit

Kepler baselayers

The British brand has released a new range of baselayers made from 100% New Zealand merino wool. Available to purchase directly from Alpkit's online store, the collection consists of short- and long-sleeve tops, neck-warmers, boxers and long-johns. The baselayer tops come in male and female cuts and the boxers and long-johns are male only. All items in the collection have flatlocked seams.

alpkit.com



Asolo

Magix approach shoes

£130 | **430g** (single size 8)

asolo.com

lower-flying weekend jaunts. The Magix, though, is the company's attempt to scale-down its bright and sturdy boots to nifty low-cut shoe size, thereby appealing to those who like to travel lighter but still require some serious shodding.

Featuring to-the-toe lacing, the Magix hugged my slender feet snugly despite not being a particularly narrow fit. The water-resistant Schoeller K-Tech and suede upper kept things cool in summer temperatures, and the velveteen lining helped minimise rubbing and blistering – even when just liner socks were worn.

The big test, however, would be the cushioning. Having suffered from foot and knee 'disease' in recent years, I anticipated issues when on multi-day routes due to the Magix's relatively stiff sole. Not to worry: the comfort of the footbed combined with a PU 'Anti-Shock' insert proved to be pleasingly comfortable. And during a prolonged volcanic scramble, both the grip provided by the Vibram sole and the protection afforded by the rubber toe-guard was first class. Back down at sea level, an afternoon of rock-pooling suggests that these shoes will also resist plentiful quantities of water.

Given the summer of scrambling and coastal walking they've been subjected to, these Magix shoes should perform well on the approach and via ferrata work they're designed for, and would also be a good choice for rocky routes up British mountains.

Paul Beasley

TGO's gear reviewers



Chris Townsend

Height 5'8" **Boot size** 9
Clothing size Medium (with short legs!)

Chris Townsend has written 17 books on the outdoors, including the award-winning *The Backpacker's Handbook*. Among his walking achievements, he was the first person to complete a continuous round of all the Munros and Tops and the first to walk the 1600-mile length of the Canadian Rockies. Chris has been reviewing gear for *The Great Outdoors* since 1991.



Judy Armstrong

Height 5'2"
Boot size 3.5/4
Clothing size 12/Women's Medium

Judy Armstrong has been testing gear for *The Great Outdoors* since 2005 but has been hillwalking and mountaineering for 30 years. Originally from New Zealand, Judy lives in the North York Moors National Park and also has a base in the French Alps.



Kirk Watson

Height 6'0"
Boot size 11
Clothing size Large

Kirk has been hillwalking since he was five and climbing since he was 13. He works as an outdoor instructor and holds the Mountain Instructor Certificate, spending most of the winter teaching mountaineering and climbing. During summer he coaches canoeing and mountaineering, and makes films. He's climbed and walked in many countries and spent six years living in Antarctica.

THE UK'S MOST EXPERIENCED GEAR TESTING TEAM

Mid Layers

Chris Townsend reviews a selection of outdoor insulators

As the days become colder and winter draws closer mid layer garments become important. Gone are the days when a light wind- or waterproof jacket was the most needed while walking. At this time of year a base layer and a thin shell is rarely adequate. Something snug and warm between those two layers is needed.

A wide range of garments can be called mid layers. The term covers anything designed to provide warmth but not protection against storms. Some mid layers are wind-resistant and even water-resistant and can be worn as outer garments when it's not raining steadily or very windy. Most though don't provide much if anything in the way of rain and wind protection. That's not their purpose. The main aim of a mid layer is to provide warmth when worn between a base layer and a shell. It should also allow moisture vapour to pass through so you don't get damp from the inside.

For many years fleece has been the main mid layer fabric. It's not hard to see why as fleece is warm for the weight, soft and comfortable, breathable, hard wearing, and not that expensive. Before synthetic fleece, wool shirts and sweaters were staple mid layer garments and now wool, already re-established in base layers, is returning, usually in a mix with synthetic fabrics. Wool is breathable and comfortable over a wide temperature range but it is heavier for the warmth than fleece and slower drying. The lightest synthetic-filled garments can make good mid layers – heavier ones are generally too hot to wear while walking, particularly under a waterproof shell, except in the worst winter blizzards – but many are not that breathable and better used for rest stops and as backup garments. Thin fleece with a windproof shell also makes a good mid layer (not windproof fleece with a membrane as this isn't breathable enough) and can be worn on its own much of the time.

The design of a mid layer can be very simple, such as a sweater with a zip neck; or quite complex, such as a jacket with a hood and different weights of fabrics in different places, along with many pockets. Both will work fine as long as they are comfortable under a waterproof shell.

In cold weather one mid layer may not be enough. If two layers will be worn they should move freely over each other and not bind at all. Two fairly light, thin layers are more versatile than one thick one too. I like to have one minimalist mid layer which outside of summer I wear all the time and a slightly heavier one to wear over it when it's really cold.

Note: all weights are for Men's Medium unless otherwise stated

Check for this

Material

Whether synthetic or natural, mid layer materials should be breathable so moisture vapour can pass through them. This is much more important than wind or water resistance, though these can be useful if you want to wear a mid layer as an outer garment some of the time.

Check for this

Hood

A hood can be quickly pulled up if your head starts to feel chilly, reducing the need to wear a hat. A hood isn't essential though. Any hood should be fairly close-fitting so it's comfortable under a shell jacket hood.





The Great Outdoors BEST BUY

★★★★★

Sherpa

Namche Zip Top

£40 | 224g

✓ lightweight, low cost, very comfortable

✗ nothing

Fabric Polartec Classic Micro fleece
Hood no
Front Closure half-length zip
Pockets no
Cuffs stretch
Hem stretch
Sizes men S-XXL, women XS-XL
www.sherpaadventuregear.co.uk

Polartec Classic Micro is a well-established lightweight fleece that is very soft, very comfortable and very durable. It's also surprisingly warm for the weight. The Namche Zip Top is a basic pullover with a zip neck. There are no other features. The double-faced fabric – fleece on both sides - is stretchy so the Namche can be close-fitting without feeling restrictive. The snug double-layer neck keeps the neck warm. The sleeves are quite long – I can pull them over the back of my hands. The fleece isn't windproof or water resistant – this is a sweater, not a jacket – but it is very breathable and dries fast when damp.

The Namche is a fairly standard fleece sweater made from probably the best thin fleece fabric. It's very light, low cost and excellent for year-round use.

The Great Outdoors BEST BUY

The Great Outdoors LIGHTEST IN TEST

★★★★★

Berghaus

VapourLight HyperTherm Hoody

£160 | 224g (L)

✓ ultralight, windproof, low bulk

✗ nothing

Fabric polyamide shell, 40 gram HydroLoft polyester fill
Hood yes
Front Closure full-length zip
Pockets two handwarmer
Cuffs elasticated
Hem elasticated
Sizes men S-XXL, women 8-18
www.berghaus.com

This is an astonishing jacket. It's the equal lightest garment tested yet also the warmest. It packs down into a much tinier bundle than any of the others too yet still has a hood, pockets and full-length zip. The HyperTherm Hoody really deserves the description ultralight. Berghaus has achieved this by sandwiching a thin layer of its Hydroloft insulation between two very thin layers of nylon. The tangle of polyester that makes up Hydroloft is far lighter and more compressible than the thinnest fleece or wool. It's also non-absorbent so although the HyperTherm isn't waterproof it dries very quickly and keeps most of its warmth when wet.

The shell fabrics are different on each side with one being more windproof than the other and the jacket is reversible, the idea being that wearing the less windproof side on the outside makes it cooler by allowing more warmth to escape. I can't say I've actually noticed much difference though.

The HyperTherm is soft and comfortable. However the material doesn't stretch and I needed a size larger than usual to allow free movement. The smooth fabrics don't bind with other fabrics and the jacket works well under a waterproof shell. The hood is close-fitting too and doesn't feel bulky under a waterproof jacket hood. It's not adjustable but fits snugly enough that the wind doesn't blow it off. The pockets are on the more windproof side and are just usable when wearing a pack hipbelt though the bottoms are cut off.

THIS IS AN ASTONISHING JACKET, THE EQUAL LIGHTEST YET THE WARMEST

If weight and bulk are important this is a superb jacket. Breathability is good, as is wind resistance, and I've found it works well both as a mid layer and, in dry cold conditions, as an outer layer. I find it too warm to wear while walking in summer but the low bulk and weight means it's no hardship to carry it for rest stops and chilly camps. The fabrics are thin and it probably wouldn't stand up to much rough usage – I wouldn't use it for scrambling – but for hillwalking and backpacking it's ideal.



The Great Outdoors RECOMMENDED

★★★★

Smartwool

Corbet 120

£145 | 415g

✓ warmth, windproof front

✗ only insulated on front

Fabric outer arms and back: 48% merino wool/44% polyester/8% Elastane; outer front: polyester panels with 75% wool/25% polyester fill; inner: 56% merino wool/44% polyester
Hood no
Front Closure full length zip with inner flap
Pockets 2 hem, 1 chest
Cuffs plain, thumb loops
Hem elasticated
Sizes men: S-XXL, women: XS-XL
www.smartwool.com

Unusual in looks and unusual in construction, the Corbet is a unique garment. The fairly thin sleeves, side and back are made from a blend of synthetic fabrics and merino wool. The outside is smooth and mostly synthetic with the wool on the inside for moisture and odour control. The front and collar are completely different. They consist of a windproof outer divided into small compartments containing a wool/polyester fill. This insulated layer is lined with merino wool. The result is a surprisingly warm garment with the insulation concentrated over the body's core but without the bulk of many insulated garments as the stretchy material over the arms and back is close-fitting.

The Corbet is comfortable and in still air and light breezes can be worn as the outer layer as long as it's not raining – the front has a DWR finish but even the lightest rain goes straight through the rest of the garment. The same applies to wind. The front may be windproof but my arms soon felt cold once the wind picked up. Worn under a shell the Corbet is comfortable but I found it quickly too hot in moderate temperatures (above +8°C). In winter it should be fine.

The handwarmer pockets are roomy but cut off by a pack hipbelt. The chest pocket is small – just big enough for a compass or phone. There's a snug stand-up collar and thumb loops on the extra-long sleeves.

I like the Corbet and the wool fill is interesting and different. I'm not sure just where it fits in my outdoor wardrobe though.

Check for this

Fit

As midlayers will be worn under shell garments they shouldn't be baggy or voluminous. If two midlayers will be worn together check that they will fit comfortably over each other.

The Great Outdoors RECOMMENDED

★★★½

Craghoppers

Prolite Half-Zip

£30 | 237g

✓ lightweight, low cost

✗ sleeves a little short

Fabric polyester microfleece
Hood no
Front Closure half-length zip
Pockets one chest
Cuffs elasticated
Hem elasticated
Sizes men X-XXL, women 8-20
www.craghoppers.com

Low cost and lightweight this simple fleece top is great value for money and a good choice for carrying in warm weather just in case. It's made from microfleece with a fluffy outside and a smooth inside – it would probably be warmer if it was the other way round. The only features are a high, warm collar, a half-length zip for ventilation and a chest pocket suitable for compass, phone and other small items. The material is very comfortable and quite stretchy so it moves with you easily. The sleeves are on the short side though and I found them riding up when I stretched – and I don't have long arms. In cold weather I'd want gloves with long cuffs to wear with this top. It's not windproof in the slightest of course and only suitable as an outer layer in still conditions. In severe cold it would need combining with another mid layer but for much of the year it could be all that's needed.



Check for this

Weight

The weight of a midlayer only matters if it'll spend much time in your rucksack. None of those reviewed are heavy. Warmer ones are usually heavier so expect that for garments for deep winter.



★★★½

Mountain Equipment

Croz Jacket

£130 | **487g**

✓ warmth

✗ not that light

Fabric Pontetorto Tecnostretch fleece, Polartec Power Dry
Hood yes
Front Closure full-length zip with inner flap
Pockets 2 handwarmer, 1 chest
Cuffs stretch, thumb loops
Hem elastic drawcord
Sizes men S-XXL
www.mountain-equipment.co.uk

The Croz is a warm jacket made from three different types of fleece. The main body, hood and lower sleeves are made from a stretch fleece with a smooth outer and fluffy inner. Under the arms and down the sides there are panels of Power Dry fleece with a raised grid for maximum breathability. Across the shoulders and upper arms there is ceramic reinforced fleece for abrasion resistance, designed in part I guess to resist wear from ropes as Mountain Equipment says the Croz is designed for climbing and mountaineering. It should also stand up to rubbing from rucksack straps if the jacket is worn as an outer garment, though this isn't likely much of the time as it's not at all wind resistant. As a mid layer it's best suited to colder weather. I found it too hot in summer while walking. Being stretchy it fits closely and is comfortable worn under a shell. The hood fits fairly snugly but isn't adjustable. Wind can blow it off but if it's that windy you'll want something over it anyway. The lower pockets can be used when wearing a rucksack hipbelt though the bottom of them is cut off. The chest pocket is fine for compass and phone.

The Croz is a comfortable jacket and a good choice if you like a fleece with pockets and a hood. These do mean extra weight though. I don't think the reinforced panels are needed for walking either.

The Great Outdoors RECOMMENDED

★★★★

Brynje

Arctic Zip Polo Jacket

£102 | **497g**

✓ fast wicking, very warm

✗ hood a little tight, pockets cut off by hipbelt

Fabric outer: 80% merino wool/20% polyamide, lining: polypropylene mesh
Hood yes
Front Closure full-length zip, inner flap
Pockets two handwarmer
Cuffs stretch, thumb loops
Hem stretch
Sizes men XS-XL, women XS-XL
www.nordiclife.co.uk

This double-layer top is very warm and definitely one for winter weather. It makes a good mid layer but can also be worn as a base layer as the inner consists of fast-wicking polypropylene mesh. The outer is soft merino wool reinforced with a little polyester. The combination traps warm air in the mesh and between the two layers and is very effective.

The garment is quite stretchy and moves easily with you. I did find the hood, which has a smooth lining, a bit tight though. It pulled at the back, suggesting there's not quite enough material here. I wouldn't want a larger size in the body however. The pockets are snug but lie under a rucksack hipbelt. The sleeves are long with thumb loops, which is good for cold weather. The garment isn't wind or water resistant of course. It's very much an inner layer except in calm dry conditions.

Even though the summer and early autumn was quite cool it wasn't cold enough for this top. I'm looking forward to trying it in really cold weather.





The Great Outdoors RECOMMENDED

★★★★

Icebreaker

Sierra Long Sleeve Zip

£160 | 422g

✓ comfort, warmth, recycled wool

✗ quite expensive, pockets covered by a hipbelt

Fabric 88% recycled merino wool, 9% nylon, 3% Elastane
Hood no
Front Closure full-length zip with inner flap
Pockets two handwarmer, one chest
Cuffs plain
Hem plain
Sizes men XS-XXL
uk.icebreaker.com

The Sierra is a superbly comfortable wool jacket. The fabric is merino wool wrapped round a nylon core. It's smooth on the outside, brushed on the inside and feels soft against the skin. The fabric does stretch a little but the fit is reasonably loose rather than close-fitting, which is good for those who don't like tight garments even if they are stretchy. It's longer than many mid layers and so unlikely to ride up and leave a gap with your trousers. The handwarmer pockets are comfy but cut off by a rucksack hipbelt. The chest pocket is fine for compass or phone or similar. The fabric is very breathable and reasonably fast drying. It's not wind resistant of course. The collar is lined so it stands up and keeps the neck warm.

This is an alternative to a standard 200-weight fleece jacket and it's a good one. I like it very much. The cost is high though.

Check for this

Pockets

Pockets aren't essential but handwarmer ones are cosy and small ones for items like a compass can be useful. Check to see if pockets can be used when wearing a pack hipbelt. Many can't.

The Great Outdoors RECOMMENDED

★★★★

Buffalo

Teclite Jacket

£157 | 458g

✓ windproof, fast wicking, pockets

✗ cost

Fabric outer: Classic Pertex, lining: Teclite micro-pile
Hood foldaway with peak and drawcord
Front Closure full-length zip with inner flap
Pockets two handwarmer
Cuffs Velcro
Hem drawcord
Sizes S-XL
www.buffalosystems.co.uk

The Teclite jacket is a mid layer that can be worn as an outer layer much of the time as it's quite wind resistant (to 40mph winds, says Buffalo) and will shed light rain. That's because of the Pertex shell, which makes it effectively a windproof jacket with a wicking lining sewn-in. The very soft fleece lining, called micro-pile by Buffalo, is comfortable, very breathable and fast drying. Worn under a waterproof the Teclite jacket feels fine. The hood fits well under a waterproof one as well. The latest version is close-fitting with a stiffened peak. The pockets are roomy and will just take a map. They can be accessed when wearing a rucksack hipbelt though the bottom is cut off.

The Teclite provides similar warmth to a microfleece top and windproof jacket combination. It's excellent in cool conditions where a little more than a windproof and base layer is required. I wore it a fair amount this last cool summer.





★★★½

Black Diamond

Dawn Patrol

£250 | **579g**

✓ water resistance, self-cleaning, Bluesign approved

✗ not windproof, expensive, quite heavy

Fabric Schoeller stretch-woven softshell
Hood adjustable, stiffened peak
Front Closure full-length zip with inner flap
Pockets 2 handwarmer, 1 chest
Cuffs Velcro
Hem elastic drawcord
Sizes men XS-XL, women XS-XL
www.eu.blackdiamondequipment.com

The Dawn Patrol is made from a very unusual material. It looks and feels like other woven soft-shell fabrics but it has a treatment that makes it astonishingly water repellent. Rain just beads up and runs off. This is because the treatment, called Nanosphere, makes the surface too rough for water droplets to adhere. The Dawn Patrol isn't claimed to be waterproof but so far rain has failed to penetrate it. The treatment is permanent too, unlike the DWR on most shell garments. Dirt, including oil, doesn't stick either and can be easily rinsed off. Oddly, though, the Dawn Patrol isn't very wind resistant, which is a drawback for UK use as rain is often accompanied by wind here. A shell garment will still be needed a fair amount of the time.

The fabric is stretchy and comfortable. It's not that warm for the weight though, being quite thin. The hood is quite protective with a good peak. The pockets are fairly roomy, though the lower ones are cut off by a rucksack hipbelt. There's a soft fleecy lining to the collar and a smooth lining in the hood.

I love the water resistance of this jacket. I just wish it was windproof as well. The price is very high, as is the weight.

THIS IS A FAIRLY BASIC **POWER STRETCH JACKET** WHICH FITS CLOSELY AND **IS COMFORTABLE** TO WEAR

★★★½

Mammut

Aconcagua

£125 | **345g**

✓ fast wicking, very warm

✗ hood a little tight, pockets cut off by hipbelt

Likes fast wicking, stretch
Dislikes quite expensive
Fabric Polartec Power Stretch Pro
Hood no
Front Closure full-length zip with internal flap
Pockets two handwarmer
Cuffs plain
Hem plain
Sizes men S-XXL, women XS-XXL
www.mammut.ch

Power Stretch is a well-proven fast wicking, soft and comfortable fleece fabric. It has a smooth outer and a fluffy inner. Moisture vapour passes rapidly through the material then spreads out over the smooth surface to evaporate. Power Stretch can be worn as either a mid or base layer. It has four-way stretch and so can be skin tight without restricting movement. For high aerobic activities it's excellent because of the fast wicking. I've worn it extensively for cross-country skiing, which produces much more sweat than walking.

The Aconcagua is a fairly basic Power Stretch jacket. It fits closely and is comfortable to wear. The roomy pockets can be used when wearing a rucksack hipbelt though, as so often, the bottom of them is cut off. The high collar is snug and warm and the sleeves are long with thumb loops.

The Aconcagua is a bit warmer than a microfleece top and a fair bit heavier and costlier too. It's not wind or water resistant but does dry very fast.



Softshe trouser

Judy Ar

cool-w

It's time to talk pants: technical trousers for active winter use. In my book, that includes hillwalking, mountaineering and ski touring. Because they need to fend off mist, snow showers or even drizzle without being shrouded in flappy overtrousers, I've gone down the softshell route. That doesn't necessarily involve membranes, although some pants now combine membrane and non-membrane fabric for the best of both worlds: breathability with targeted weather protection.

It's hard (impossible?) to find technical salopettes for women, or even high-waisted pants with adjustable braces (and by technical, I include a drop seat: when you're wearing a harness, multiple layers plus a transceiver, and it's raining or snowing, you need to be able to drop that flap).

So instead, we're going for technical pants, ideally with high-ish waists, scuff guards against crampon spikes or touring skis, and fabric that will do the business in autumn, winter and spring.

Softshell fabric has inherent trade-offs. More water resistance or windproofing means reduced breathability, so if you are going to be active (and you are), you need the correct balance. There is nothing worse than (and apologies if this is indelicate) a clammy crotch, so the right fabric used in the right places is important. Denser fabrics need venting, and virtually all trousers in this league need stretch, unless they have incredibly clever panelling.

This kind of trouser often has a complex lower leg and ankle cuff – gussets, zips, lace hooks and studs are common – so they are tricky to shorten. Many brands offer a choice of leg lengths so I've included inside leg measurements; some are graded with sizes but many are a set length regardless. Better to go too long than too short: they can bunch up above your boot, but you don't need a gap at your ankles: you shouldn't need to wear gaiters as well.

Right. Let's crack on. I tested these trousers through winter and spring, with a top-up in autumn: mainly hillwalking, ski touring and snowshoeing, with some opportunistic ice climbing. Comments on fit are kept to a minimum since we're all individuals (as Michael Palin said in *Life of Brian*) and I'm quietly confident that many of you are a lot slimmer than me...



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I TESTED **THESE TROUSERS** THROUGH **WINTER, SPRING AND AUTUMN**

★★★★★

The Great Outdoors BEST BUY

Berghaus

Women's Winter Patera Pant

£140

- ✓ stretch, fit, versatility, cuff/lower leg, waistband, venting
- ✗ nothing

Fabric: Berghaus AF Softshell (207g/m2): 90% polyamide, 10% elastane; DWR
Sizes: 8-18 (men: 30"-42")
Leg length: Short (73.5cm/29"), Regular (79cm/31"), Long (84cm/33")
Weight: 453g (size 12/29")
www.berghaus.com

Patera are super-comfortable, versatile pants. They are lightweight for softshell, with a high degree of all-way stretch. This not only makes them suitable for active, athletic adventures but allows layering underneath of base layer legwear. With no real insulation qualities (and minimal wind and water resistance), that's an important factor for winter use. But the lack of insulation, which corresponds with a high degree of breathability, also makes them versatile for the other seasons. With zipped thigh vents, a venting thigh pocket with mesh backing, and mesh-lined hip pockets which gape to vent when opened (plus a rear pocket), you've a pair of trousers for everything but high summer. DWR is moderately effective when new, but needs refreshing after a few washes (Berghaus say 10, I'd say less). Fit, thanks to the stretch, will work for most shapes. Panelling and general cut enhance fit and comfort even further: a crotch gusset, articulated knees, offset side seams, and a high rise are all spot-on for women. The waistband is well shaped, knit lined, with a zip and two sturdy poppers, plus a low profile belt that doesn't interfere with a rucksack hipbelt. Lower legs and cuff hems (nice touch; I have too many trousers with frayed cuffs) have scuffguard protection against crampons and ski edges, with a zip to mid-calf height for venting and boot access. Plus, there's a zip-off short internal gaiter with two studs, a lace hook and sticky elastic, for securing the cuff over winter boots (I removed it for non-snow use). As a minor point I'd love double knee patches for kneeling on wet ground while rummaging in a pack, but that's small fry. Great job, Berghaus.

★★★★★

The Great Outdoors RECOMMENDED

Mountain Equipment

Women's Epic Touring Pant

£170

- ✓ fabric combination, fit, durability
- ✗ nothing

Fabric: EXOlite 275 (50% polyamide, 43% polyester, 7% elastane), Windstopper softshell (ePTFE membrane)
Sizes: 8-16 (men: 30-38)
Leg length: Short (29"), Regular (31"). Men's: Regular (31"), Long (33")
Weight: 504g (size Medium/Reg)
www.mountain-equipment.co.uk

I've been wearing the forerunner to Epic Touring Pant for the last 10 winters, mainly for ski touring. It is, indeed, epic, so I was psyched to test the new version. Except it turns out the 2014 trouser is changing, again, this autumn/winter. ME say the differences are a slightly trimmer fit, the addition of a secure transceiver pocket within a thigh vent and a wider belt. The fabric and general design principles remain the same: good news, as the combination of stretch, breathable EXOlite fabric with Windstopper (membrane) softshell on seat, thighs and knees works brilliantly. The Windstopper is highly water and wind resistant and holds the DWR, while the lighter fabric is flexible and breathable. The cut is relaxed enough for base layer leggings (I found the inner face scratchy against bare skin) and the small (EXOlite) panel under the crotch is comfortable. The waistband has a soft lining, two studs and a low profile belt. Lower legs have a short scuffguard, zip with solid gusset and a Velcro volume reducing strap to cinch in over boot tops. There's a touch of elastication and enough width in the cuffs to fit over ski touring boots or winter climbing boots, plus wide gripper elastic, instead of a fixed inner gaiter. Zipped thigh vents are mesh-backed and effective although the new pants will have reduced airflow as the right vent incorporates a transceiver-sized pocket. Hip pockets are a decent size for hands or storage. The combination of protection and comfort makes them truly versatile for cool and cold weather all-mountain use. These are cracking pants, with the possibility that the new version (pictured) are even better.



Check for this

Venting

Thighs, knees and ankles are the usual ventilation points. Usually a zip, with or without mesh backing, works. Venting keeps things cool when the going gets hot; make sure you can close them off effectively when the temperature drops.

★★★★½

Vaude

Women's Montafon Pants III

£130



- ✓ fabric, waistband
- ✗ integral gaiter with lace hook

Fabric: Windproof 80: 93% polyamide, 7% elastane
Sizes: 34/XXS - 44/XL (men: 46-56)
Leg length: Short (72-76cm), Regular (77-81cm), Long (82-86cm).
Weight: 503g (size 38/Short)
www.vaude.com

Vaude make technical clothing at competitive prices; it's a brand that deserves a higher British profile. Women's Montafon Pants are a good example, made from performance fabric with quality construction. The stretch fabric is lightweight, single-layer softshell with moderate DWR. Vaude claims 80 percent windproofing, which I found impossible to quantify although yes, there is wind resistance, which does affect breathability. The cut is slimmer than the UK-designed brands so the stretch will be a necessary factor for many UK-built women. I couldn't fit base layer leggings underneath so in colder weather I used lightweight overtrousers to compensate. The close, stretchy fit made these somewhat too snug around the crotch, but that could just be me... Design features include a stretch panel which runs seamlessly from calf to calf via the crotch, and articulated knees. The waistband is wide, with two studs, zip, and a short elasticated section at the back, plus loops for attaching suspenders (not supplied). Two small hip pockets are mesh-lined. There's no thigh venting or other pocketing. Lower leg has a Cordura scuffguard and a mid-calf zip with solid gusset which opens wide enough to cover a winter boot. A short inner gaiter, with gripper elastic and lace hook, is integrated. This worked with winter climbing boots; Vaude say these are ski touring pants, but how does a lace hook work with plastic, buckled boots? You're right: it doesn't. Given the lightweight softshell fabric, the pants would be more versatile if the gaiter was removable (as Berghaus Patera) but they're still a good cool-weather choice for the slimmer hiker.

Check for this

Ankle cuff

The more gubbins at the ankle, the harder trousers are to hem. You can hem cuffs with a zip, but legs that noticeably flare or narrow are harder to keep neat when shortened. Very stretchy fabric also needs special attention.

★★★★½

Rab

Women's Ascender Pant

£95



- ✓ stretch, dual fabric, ankle shockcord, leg lengths, price
- ✗ crotch seaming, lack of venting, two-way front zip

Fabric: Matrix softshell (92% nylon, 8% Spandex), DWR
Sizes: 8-16 (men: S-XXL)
Leg length: Short (28"/71cm), regular (30"/76cm), long (32"/81cm). Men: add 2"
Weight: 485g (size 12/32")
Rab-equipment/uk

Rab make great gear for women and these pants, as usual, hit the mark. Lightweight and stretchy, they are versatile for use in cool conditions, with a sufficiently relaxed fit to accommodate base layer leggings in properly cold weather. Two weights of Rab's own Matrix fabric are used: heavier on seat and knees, for cold, da winter conditions. The fabric has a soft, almost brushed inner face; the outer has enough DWR for moderate water resistance. Breathability is good, given the cool-weather fabric thickness. There is no crotch gusset and I didn't find the fit loose enough to ignore the central seam junction; this was my only real negative against the trousers. Knee panels are articulated. The static waistband has a brushed Tricot lining and belt loops (no belt supplied). Two studs top a two-way zip; this puzzles me as the zip isn't long enough to allow a she-wee and I can't think why else a women's trouser would need this feature. Suggestions on a postcard? There are two small hip pockets and a larger (although not bellowed) thigh pocket; none of these vent. Lower leg has a supple but tough and effective scuffguard and zip with solid gusset. The hem is quite wide, with shockcord to cinch it in over a winter or ski touring boot. There is no internal gaiter: a sensible decision given the lightweight softshell fabric, so bulk is minimal and the lower leg fits neatly over or under a standard or short stand-alone gaiter. Leg length options are sensible and versatile. Fab pants, which would be even better with a crotch panel.

Check for this

Crotch gusset

Technical pants are generally not loose fitting, so a crotch gusset makes a big difference to comfort. The extra piece of fabric allows more flexibility and movement; if the trousers just have a central seam they can feel restrictive.

★★★½

Montane

Women's Sky Mountain P

£120



- ✓ highly water/wind repeller warm
- ✗ low rise, reduced breathability, lack of venti no leg length options

Fabric: Chameleon4: 86% nylon (269g/m2), 14% Spandex, DWR; polyester waffle lining
Sizes: 8-16 (no men's version)
Leg length: Regular: 78.5 (size 8) – 84.5 (size 16), graded
Weight: 570g (size 12)
www.montane.co.uk

The double layer of durable softshell fabric lined with waffle polyester makes Sky Mountain the most insulated of the pants tested. While comfortable again bare skin, the lining has significantly less stretch than the outer fabric so reduces the over effect. I found it restrictive over thighs and seat (knees are articulated and move well). This is not so noticeable while walking, more so when a greater range of movement is needed for climbing, etc. The rise is lower than the other pants, exacerbated by the thick, bonded fabric; I find a higher rise better for movement and with layers. A generous waist measurement has a microfleece lining and removable belt threaded through hefty loops. The Chameleon4 outer fabric has a high degree of water and wind repellency with correspondingly reduced breathability. Two very short zipped vents on the thighs are mesh-lined; these gape but don't let much air through, and I found the trousers quickly felt clammy around my crotch and inner thigh. Zipped, mesh-lined hip pockets are a good size; inside the right one is a solid-fabric security pocket. Lower leg has a tough scuffguard and zip with solid gusset; unzipped, it fits neatly over bigger boots. There is no internal gaiter nor means of cinching the cuff close, and my lower leg got clammy when wearing an external gaiter in snow (a cord can be threaded through eyelets in the cuff to hold the lower leg in place but I found that didn't stop snow ingress). These are durable trousers with a high quality of construction and attention to detail, best in cold, damp weather for women with long legs.

Check for this

Water repellency

DWR coatings should be effective for several (most brands claim up to 10) washes. Tumble drying on a low setting helps reactivate DWR; after that, try Grangers XT spray (waterproof coating for softshell fabrics).

★★★★½

jällräven

Keb Trousers W

£175

The Great Outdoors RECOMMENDED



- ✓ tough fabric, cuff adjustment, stretch panels
- ✗ static over seat, different proofing treatments for stretch/static panels

Fabric: G-1000 Eco (65% recycled polyester, 35% organic cotton with Greenland Wax), stretch panels (63% polyamide, 26% polyester, 11% elastane)
Sizes: 34 – 48 (men: 44-60)
Leg length: Short (30-33"), Regular (32-35"), size graded
Weight: 603g (size 40/Short)
www.fjallraven.co.uk

vedish brand Fjällräven know how to sign for tough conditions. I've classed Keb trousers as softshell because the -1000 fabric has give-and-take water resistance: it can be increased with the ldition of Greenland Wax (smear a thin layer onto the trousers from a wax block, en warm it with iron or hair dryer). This only works on the static G-1000 fabric, a spray-on DWR is needed on the stretch panels. Once you get your head around it, this is a versatile system: lots of wax makes them highly water repellent and wind resistant, and the stuff washes out for more breathability in milder conditions. The cut is long, quite slim with room at the waist, with leg lengths graded with trouser sizing. Stretch panels are used behind the knees, across the seat yoke and groin and down the inside of the legs. Everywhere else is a double layer of static, durable fabric; I found this slightly restricted movement. Same fabric is used in front pockets on the thighs. These are an assortment of bellowed, patched, zipped and studded pockets; none are big enough for an OS map but I may be the only person still using those... Knees are shaped for movement and flex. Waist is static with a removable belt. Lower legs can be cinched close using studs and an elasticated tab, with a lace hook, to fit over winter or lightweight boots (any fabric bulge is to the outside so doesn't snag or rub). Venting is via a short zip above the cuff and longer zips down the thigh sides; all open rather than mesh-backed. Keb are aimed at trekkers rather than climbers; I did use them for snowshoeing and found the direct venting worked well.

Check for this

Waist

If you change shape with the month and the season, look for side or back elastic and belt loops so the waist can ease out or be pulled in. Avoid low waist and low rise (measurement from crotch to waistband). A flat waist is more comfortable with a rucksack or waist harness.

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Big packs

See *The Great Outdoors* October 2015 for the full reviews



BEST BUY
Osprey
Atmos AG 65
★★★★½ £180 / 2.25kg (M)
"It isn't lightweight nor is it inexpensive. But if you're carrying heavy loads it is an excellent pack."

RECOMMENDED
Lowe Alpine
Zephyr 65:75
★★★★ £150 / 2kg
"This pack is made from tough fabrics and the design gives ample access to gear. I like the seven external pockets and size zip."

RECOMMENDED
Fjällräven
Kaipak 58
★★★★ £195 / 2.25kg
"Isn't light and it's one of the most expensive packs tested. However it should prove very robust and the design is good."

RECOMMENDED
Black Diamond
Mercury 65
★★★★ £180 / 2.4kg (L)
"The heaviest pack tested. However the harness system does work well and it should prove very durable."

RECOMMENDED
Berghaus
Wilderness 65+15
★★★★ £140 / 2.1kg
"With a stiff curved frame and wide hipbelt, the Wilderness is designed to handle heavy loads and it does so well."

Mountain jackets

See *The Great Outdoors* October 2015 for the full reviews



BEST BUY
Millet
Trilogy Gore-Tex Pro
★★★★★ £465 / 590g
"I can't fault any of the design or features of this jacket – it is fantastic in bad weather."

RECOMMENDED
Páramo
Enduro
★★★★★ £370 / 849g (size L)
"An amazing waterproof. My jacket of choice in horizontal rain or blizzard conditions."

RECOMMENDED
Berghaus
Kangchenjunga
★★★★½ £400 / 481g (size L)
"A very well-designed mountain jacket that will last you a long time and keep you warm and dry in all four seasons."

RECOMMENDED
Rab
Latok Jacket
★★★★ £325 / 720g
"If you got rid of two pockets from the front then there would be little to criticise."

CHEAPEST ON TEST
Helly Hansen
Odin Traverse Jacket
★★★½ £230 / 570g
"A little sweaty and two useless pockets on the waist, but otherwise a very sturdy waterproof jacket for a great price."

Gloves

See *The Great Outdoors* November 2014 for the full reviews



BEST BUY
Extremities
Storm Glove GTX
★★★★½ £40 / 148g
"They're waterproof, breathable and warm, making them suitable for severe winter conditions."

RECOMMENDED
Snugpak
GeoGrip
★★★★ £20 / 81g
"These are very stretchy and sticky. They're also virtually windproof, very water-resistant and quick drying."

RECOMMENDED
LIGHTEST IN TEST
Regatta
Touchtip Stretch Gloves
★★★★ £15 / 37g
"The weight is so low they can always be in a corner of the pack. The price is low too."

RECOMMENDED
SealSkinz
Dragoneye
★★★★ £38 / 110g
"Comfortable and close-fitting. The reinforced palm and fingers gives good grip."

RECOMMENDED
Lowe Alpine
Raptor Glove
★★★★ £65 / 202g
"The thickness means you can't do much with your fingers, but these are for warmth not dexterity."

Gaiters

See *The Great Outdoors* January 2014 for the full reviews



BEST BUY
Páramo
Gaiters
★★★★½ £52 / 368g (L)
"These have been my favourite gaiters for many years as they are very breathable and very

RECOMMENDED
Páramo
Short Gaiters
★★★★ £32 / 186g (M)
"They keep dirt, grass seeds, bits of heather, scree, grit and snow out of your boots."

RECOMMENDED
Berghaus
GTX
★★★★ £35 / 220g (S/M)
"Berghaus's GTX gaiters have been around for many years and have proven to be functional and durable."

LIGHTEST IN TEST
Sea to Summit
Tumbleweed
★★★½ £18 / 114g (L/XL)
"If you don't don't need them to be waterproof these are good for shoving in the pack."

RECOMMENDED
LIGHTEST IN TEST
(Full-length gaiters)
Rab Stretch Neo
£40 / 204g (M)
★★★★ "These are excellent gaiters."

THE NORTH FACE

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Descending into Loch Avon Basin

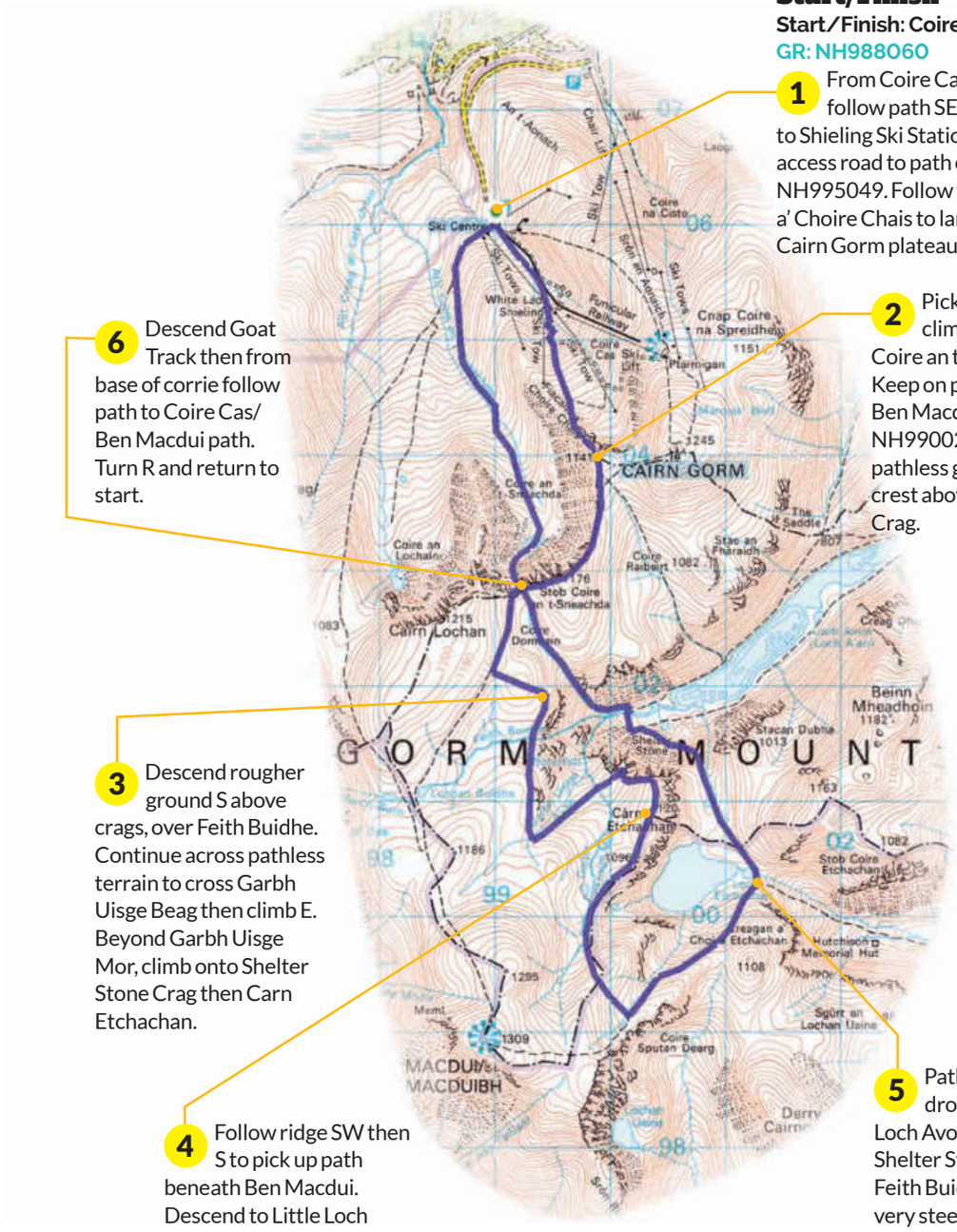
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19.5km/12 miles/7 hours
Ascent 1105m/3625ft



Maps

Carn Etchachan and Loch Avon
Cairngorms SCOTLAND



Start/Finish
Start/Finish: Coire Cas car park
GR: NH988060

1 From Coire Cas car park, follow path SE into Coire Cas to Shieling Ski Station. Turn R, take access road to path on R at NH995049. Follow this over Fiacaill a' Choire Chais to large cairn on Cairn Gorm plateau.

2 Pick up main path, climb over Stob Coire an t-Sneachda. Keep on path towards Ben Macdui but leave it at NH990022. Cross pathless ground SE to crest above Hell's Lum Crag.

3 Descend rougher ground S above crags, over Feith Buidhe. Continue across pathless terrain to cross Garbh Uisge Beag then climb E. Beyond Garbh Uisge Mor, climb onto Shelter Stone Crag then Carn Etchachan.

4 Follow ridge SW then S to pick up path beneath Ben Macdui. Descend to Little Loch Etchachan, cross Coire Etchachan Burn.

5 Path heads NW, dropping down into Loch Avon basin and past Shelter Stone. Cross Feith Buidhe then take very steep path up Coire Domhain to reach lip of Coire an t-Sneachda.

6 Descend Goat Track then from base of corrie follow path to Coire Cas/Ben Macdui path. Turn R and return to start.



Walked by
Keith Fergus

One plateau, two corries, two lochs

A WONDERFUL AND WILD mountain walk doesn't necessarily have to summit any Munros (or any mountain top for that matter).

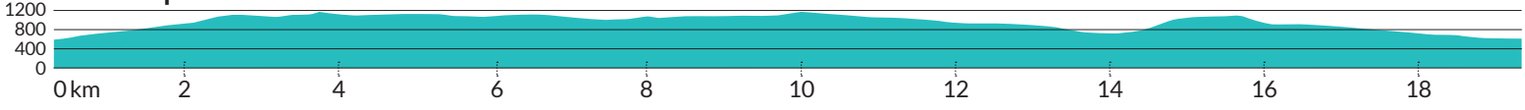
I considered this as I left the Coire Cas car park, from where the highest slopes of Meall a' Bhuachaille emerged above a cloud inversion. I was heading out on a route that would utilise part of the Cairn Gorm plateau, two steep corries, two breathtaking lochs and two of the best viewpoints you could hope for.

The walk that crossed Shelter Stone Crag and Carn Etchachan, past Loch Etchachan and Loch Avon, then ascended Coire Domhain was strenuous and challenging but also, at times, remote and wild with incredible scenery and beautiful wildlife.

A climb up Fiacaill a' Choire Chais led easily onto the Cairn Gorm plateau and then Stob Coire an t-Sneachda (at 1176m the highest point of the day, but not a Munro), where I marvelled at the great granite precipice of the Northern Corries.

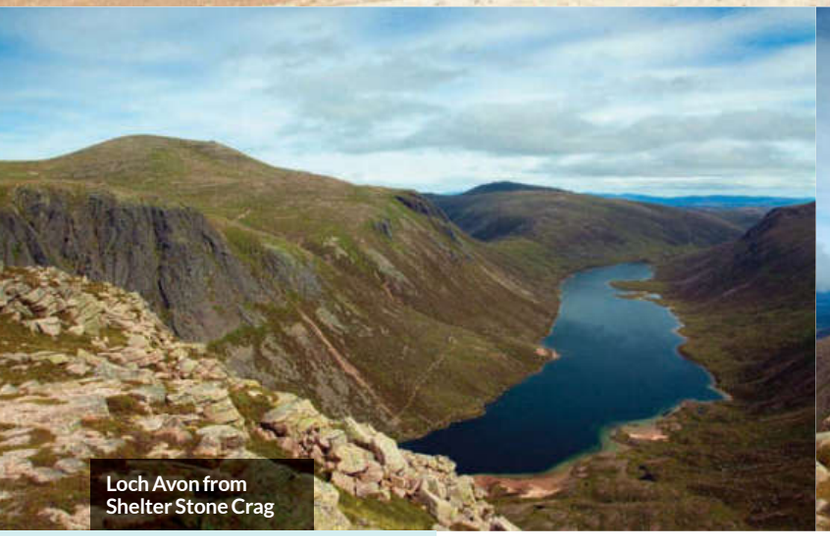
The wide expanse of the plateau, where reindeer drifted

Gradient profile Metres above sea level

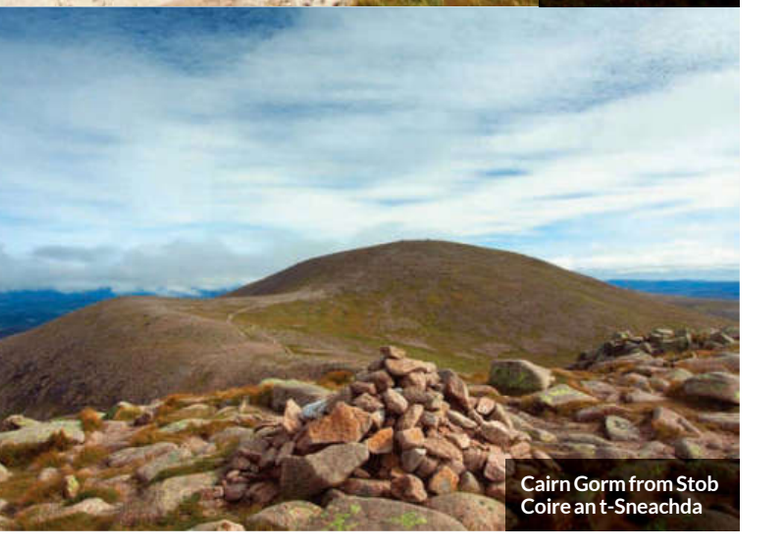




The sandy shores of Loch Avon



Loch Avon from Shelter Stone Crag



Cairn Gorm from Stob Coire an t-Sneachda

Further information

Maps: Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 36 (Aviemore & Grantown on Spey)

Transport: Regular Scotrail Services from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness to Aviemore. Regular bus (G10) between Glasgow and Inverness to Aviemore, bus (M91) between Edinburgh and Inverness to Aviemore. Bus (31) from Aviemore to Coire Cas (0871 200 2233, www.travelinescotland.com)

Information: Glenmore Visitor Centre, 01479 861220

languorously, was soon left behind for rougher, remoter terrain that continued above Hell's Lum Crag and down to crisp clear waters of Feith Bhuidhe.

I managed to keep my shoes dry (just) but having stayed high above steep slopes, the crossing of Garbh Uisge Beag was not quite as successful and damp feet made the climb onto Shelter Stone Crag and then Carn Etchachan.

From both vantage points a breathtaking view led along the emerald green waters of Loch Avon to Cairn Gorm, Bynack Mor and onwards to Moray and Ben Rinnes. The chirrup of a skylark and the mew of a buzzard broke the silence.

Carn Etchachan's long ridge dropped down to the lower slopes of Ben Macdui then gorgeous Loch Etchachan where I stopped for lunch within this stunning natural amphitheatre.

However, for me the best was yet to come with a descent into the Loch Avon basin, home to the renowned Shelter Stone Crag and one of the finest and possibly highest beaches in Britain. Again, I could only shake my head in awe at such a place.

Yet this pleasure was swiftly replaced by pain as I climbed the relentlessly steep slopes of Coire Domhain, albeit along an excellent path – and I was glad to leave its tight confines back onto the Cairn Gorm plateau.

My thighs were then presented with further punishment as the steep incline of the Goat Track led down into Coire an t-Sneachda. I craned my neck to watch two climbers negotiate the vertical slabs of Central Gully before pushing my weary legs onwards (the cloud cloaking Meall a' Bhuachaille had now dissipated) and back to Coire Cas.

No Munros but a truly unforgettable walk.

Always take a map and compass with you. ©Crown copyright 2015 Ordnance Survey. Media 062/15

2

26km/16 miles/8-10 hours
Ascent 2870m/9416ft



Maps

Glen Etive Munros, Central Highlands, SCOTLAND

Start/Finish
GR: NN134466

1 Start from road near foot of Glen Etive across the river from house at Coileitir. Take the track slanting down to the river, cross the bridge and then follow the track S round the policies of the house to reach a bridge over the Allt Mheuran.

2 Cross bridge and follow path S for about 1km before branching off SW up the NE ridge of Ben Starav. Follow all the way to summit.

3 Follow the rocky ridge in an E curve over Stob Coire Dheirg and down to cairn at 766m col.

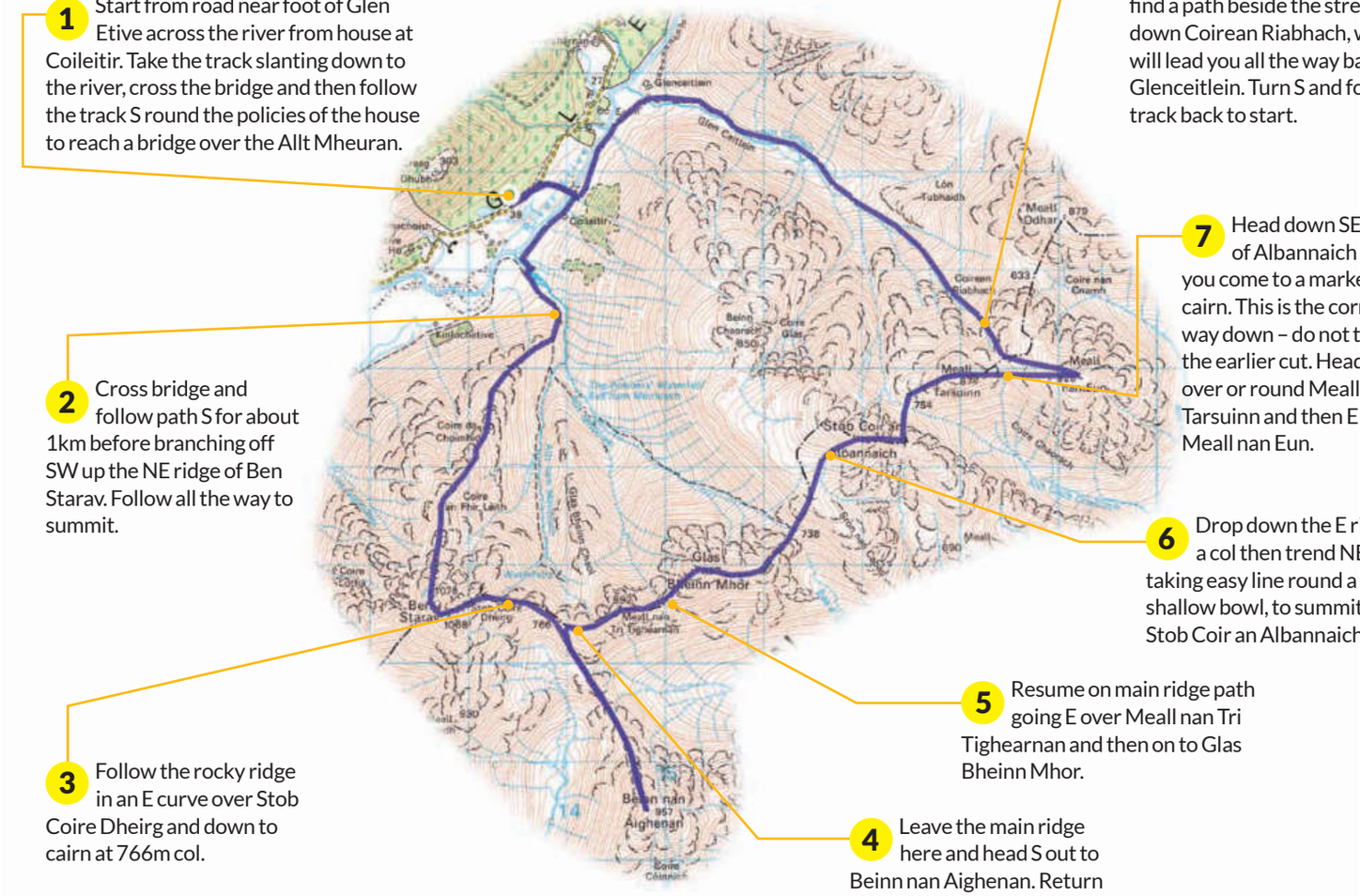
4 Leave the main ridge here and head S out to Beinn nan Aighenan. Return the same way to the cairn.

5 Resume on main ridge path going E over Meall nan Tri Tighearnan and then on to Glas Bheinn Mhor.

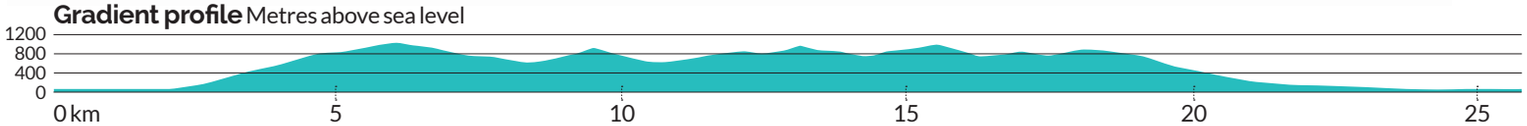
6 Drop down the E ridge to a col then trend NE, taking easy line round a shallow bowl, to summit of Stob Coir an Albannaich.

7 Head down SE ridge of Albannaich until you come to a marker cairn. This is the correct way down – do not take the earlier cut. Head SE over or round Meall Tarsuinn and then E to Meall nan Eun.

8 There are steep faces all round this hill so head back to the col between Meall nan Eun and Meall Tarsuinn. You will find a path beside the stream down Coirean Riabhach, which will lead you all the way back to Glenceitlein. Turn S and follow track back to start.



Gradient profile Metres above sea level





Walked by
Alan Rowan

A superb circuit

THE DRIVE DOWN GLEN

Etive is a mountain lover's dream, every twist and turn of the road revealing fresh joys. From the Buachailles and Bidean nam Bian at the top end to the slabs of Beinn Trilleachan at the bottom, all accompanied by the boiling waters of the River Etive. And then there's the Ben Starav Munros, a chain of five mighty mountains which dominate the lower eastern side of the glen.

They are rough, tough hills and most walkers satisfy themselves by doing them piecemeal. But apart from one diversion they make a natural round, and it makes sense to keep going when you are on that skyline. It's a long day and a lot of ascent but there are plenty of options to escape if it all gets too much.

Ben Starav is the first target, an irresistible mountain whose siren song draws you onwards up its unrelenting north-east ridge and into a field of giant boulders which continue until you reach the chaotic summit cairn. I always



Looking back over route from Stob Coir'an Albannaich

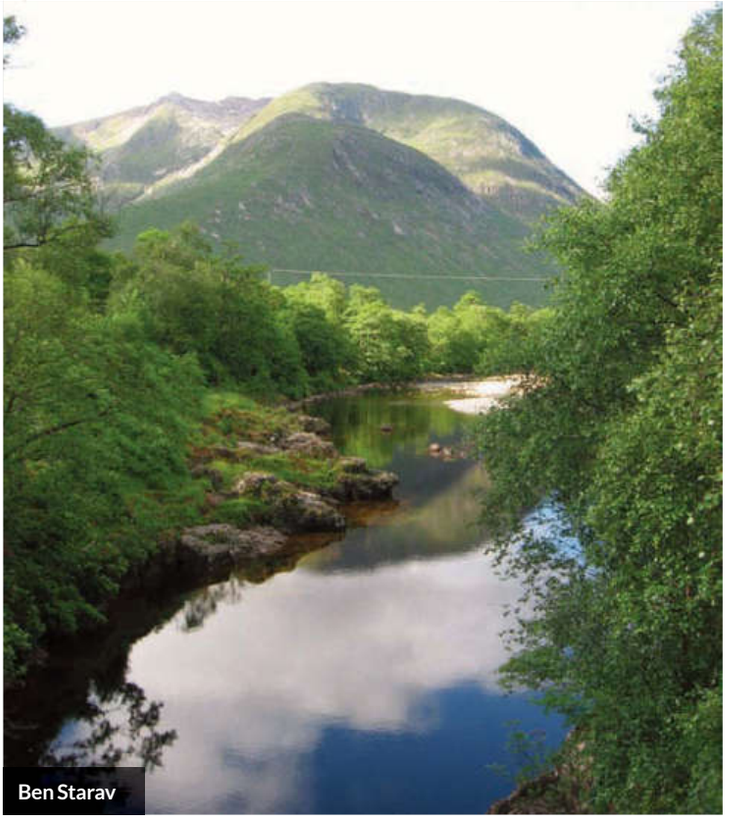
love the boulder hop round the corrie to Stob Coire Dheirg with the whole range stretched out ahead, luring you on.

The first decision comes when you reach the col. Beinn nan Aighenan sits off the ridge out to the south, the annoying little brother sticking his tongue at you. It's about an hour out and almost the same back but in clear weather the only problem is likely to be a psychological battle over the height loss. The ascent of Glas Bheinn Mhor will be a good indicator as to your chances of doing all five Munros. The first time I attempted the full round, I struggled up these slopes on leaden legs. By the time I hit the summit I decided enough was enough and the other two could wait for another day. I dropped down the east ridge and then took the path down the left bank of the Allt Mheuran. This time, however, I breezed up this section.

From the next col there's an initial steep climb, then it's just a case of keeping to an easy curving line on grassy terrain to reach the top of Stob Coir'an Albannaich and its curious cairn, a lump on the ridge composed of moss, grass, rock and granite sand.

Meall nan Eun is the smallest hill of the group but it can still cause problems. First there's the descent from Albannaich. Head east down the ridge until you find a marker cairn. This is the safe way down. Do not be tempted by an earlier cut – this leads to steep ground. Then you have to cross or bypass the minor peak of Meall Tarsuinn before an easy stroll up to the flat top of the final Munro.

Despite its harmless looking summit, Meall nan Eun has a few heavy weapons in its armoury. It is surrounded by steep craggy slopes, so the only safe way off is to retrace your steps to its col with Meall Tarsuinn and find the path which follows the right bank of the stream down into Glen Ceitlein. The grassy terrain is a godsend to tired feet after a very long day.



Ben Starav

Further information

Maps: Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Landranger sheet 50 (Glen Orchy & Loch Etive)

Transport: Buses from Glasgow to Fort William travel along the A82. Nearest train station is at Bridge of Orchy on West Highland line (both bus and train are a considerable distance from start of route)

Information: www.glencoetourism.co.uk or www.visitscotland.com

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3

14.2km/8.8 miles/5½ hours
Ascent 2420ft/738m

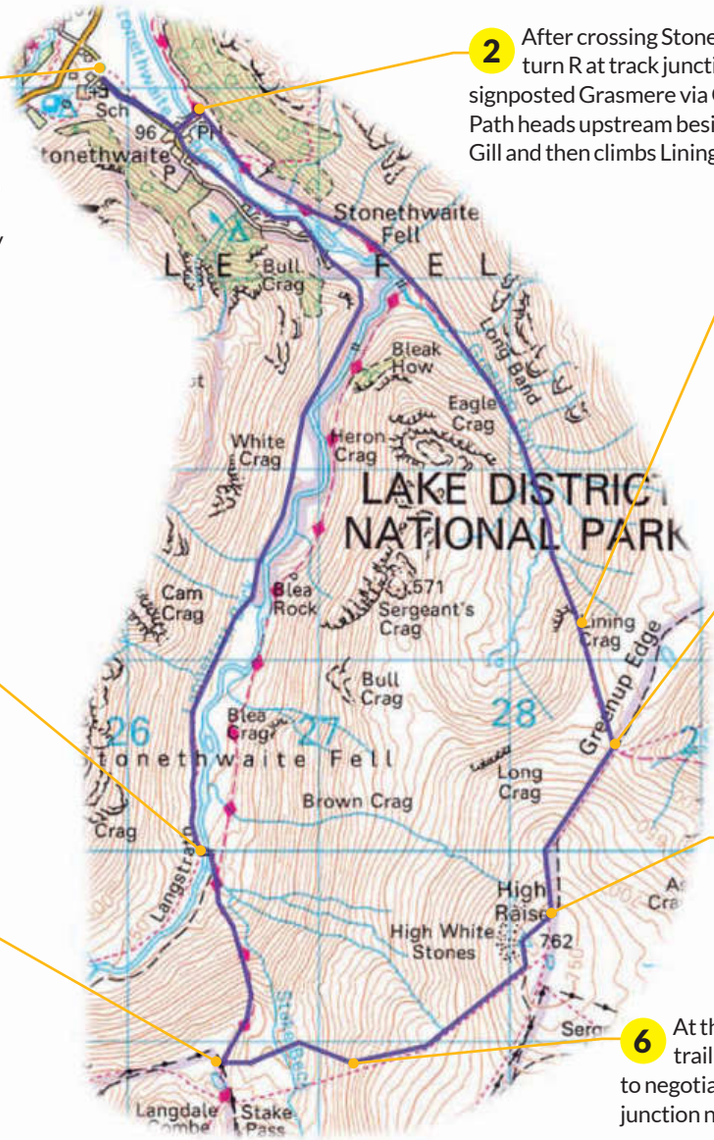


Maps

High Raise from Borrowdale, Lake District ENGLAND

Start/finish:
Borrowdale School in Stonethwaite
GR: NY258140
The school's car park, with honesty box, can be used outside of school hours. Otherwise, park on the roadside nearby

1 Follow minor road SE into Stonethwaite proper. Reaching phone box at bend in road, take rough track on L.



2 After crossing Stonethwaite Beck, turn R at track junction – signposted Grasmere via Greenup Edge. Path heads upstream beside Greenup Gill and then climbs Lining Crag.

3 Swinging L from top of crag, onward route is unclear at first but soon becomes more obvious. Bear R at fork - along cairned route. This heads SSE at first, but weaves about to avoid boggy bits.

4 Reaching rusty, redundant fencepost at path crossing on Greenup Edge, turn R. After second of two rocky outcrops, path swings R – away from fenceposts – to reach trig pillar on High Raise.

5 Walk between trig pillar and shelter, head SSW, skirting top edge of boulders. Beyond rocks, pick up faint trail through grass (SW).

6 At third gill, instead of crossing, follow trail down to R. Cross beck and head SW to negotiate damp ground on way to path junction near Stake Pass.

7 Turn right to follow Stake Beck downstream. Cross bridge and then strike off NNW over damp, pathless ground to reach bridge over Langstrath Beck.

8 Cross and turn R. Path and then clear track eventually lead back to Stonethwaite.

Gradient profile Metres above sea level





Walked by
Vivienne Crow

A variety of valleys

IN OUR INSATIABLE QUEST for the summits, many of us hill-walkers tend to forget the valleys hold as many, if not more, delights than the high ground. In the Lake District, they are places that reward attention to detail; places where the bedrock has been smoothed by the passing of glaciers, where waterfalls plummet over the lip of blackened rocks, where trees and juniper cling to the side of gills, peregrines call from the crags and secrets remain hidden for years.

With this thought in mind, I headed out from Borrowdale to have a slow saunter through two of its side valleys: Greenup Gill and Langstrath. Reaching a high point of 762m on High Raise wouldn't be the culminating point of the walk, just a by-product, a convenient way to link the two.

As I set off from Stonethwaite, I was surprised to see the ancient oak woods still had a lot of green about them for October. The bracken had already bronzed and some trees had started turning,



Looking south-west from the top of High Raise, the skyline takes in, from left, Crinkle Crags, Bow Fell, Esk Pike and the Scafell group



Footbridge over Langstrath Beck

but Borrowdale's famous autumnal display was still a few weeks off. The sun, fairly low in the sky, cast the sort of long shadows that I miss on summer walks. They messed with my sense of perspective as I gazed up towards Eagle Crag, making distances hard to determine.

Reaching a temporary respite from the climb, I topped a small rise to look down on a drumlin field at the head of the valley. Overhead, I could hear the honking of geese, skeins making their way south from the Arctic to winter on Britain's wetlands.

I looked up, trying to locate the V-formation. I eventually spotted it: more of a scraggly 'W' than a 'V'.

Before long, I was at the foot of Lining Crag. With the sun directly behind it, this pyramid of rock can seem rather intimidating at first. I remember my first experience of it, almost 25 years ago when walking the Coast to Coast. Weighed down with a heavy pack and tired from an almost sleepless night under canvas, I felt daunted as I looked up at the rock. What I hadn't yet spotted was the path making its way up to the left of the bare rock via a series of easy steps.

Up on to Greenup Edge, that navigational bane of Coast-to-Coasters, and then along to High Raise where the far-reaching outlook takes in everything from Skiddaw in the north to Morecambe Bay in the south. I followed a faint trail down towards Stake Pass and then descended the recently repaired route of another long-distance route – the Cumbria Way – into Langstrath.

Ownership of the 'long valley', was originally granted to Fountains Abbey near Ripon in North Yorkshire in 1195, but the rest of Borrowdale was sold to Furness Abbey in 1209. Stonethwaite being home to rich pasturelands, both abbeys claimed to own it. The resulting dispute became so bitter that Edward I intervened and confiscated the land in 1304. Eventually, the monks from Fountains outwitted their Cumbrian rivals and bought the land from the crown for 40 shillings.

No quarrelling monks in the 21st Century; just fans of the great outdoors seeking out the valley's many delights. Scramblers and boulderers find plenty of entertainment on the crags and enormous rocks that litter the slopes; in summer, swimmers brave the chill waters of Blackmoss Pot; and, if you see people poking around beneath boulders, scratching their heads, looking lost, they're probably trying to find Langstrath's not-so-secret, 'secret' cave. I'll say no more...

Further information

Maps: Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Explorer sheets OL4 (English Lakes, North-western area) and OL6 (English Lakes, South-western area); Harvey 1:25,000 Superwalker Lake District West

Transport: Bus 78 and, summer only, 77/77A. Traveline 0871 2002223

Information: Keswick Information Centre, 017687 72645; www.keswick.org

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4

21km/13 miles/6-7 hours
Ascent 670m/2200ft

Maps

Grizedale Forest, Lake District ENGLAND

Start/Finish
Parking at High Cross West of Hawkshead
GR: SD332986

1 Track S for 800m. Right turn at T junction heading SW along edge of forest to yellow arrow pointing to grassy path.

2 S along this path to T junction. SW for 200m to junction with public footpath.

3 Public footpath SSW passing masts at High Man for 1.5km to T junction. (You can reach tarn below High Man on minor diversion). Turn left to reach major junction.

4 Follow bridleway SW for 1km, footpath S passing High Birk for 1km, then bridleway again SW to major junction then SE 1km, then E dropping through trees to reach track.

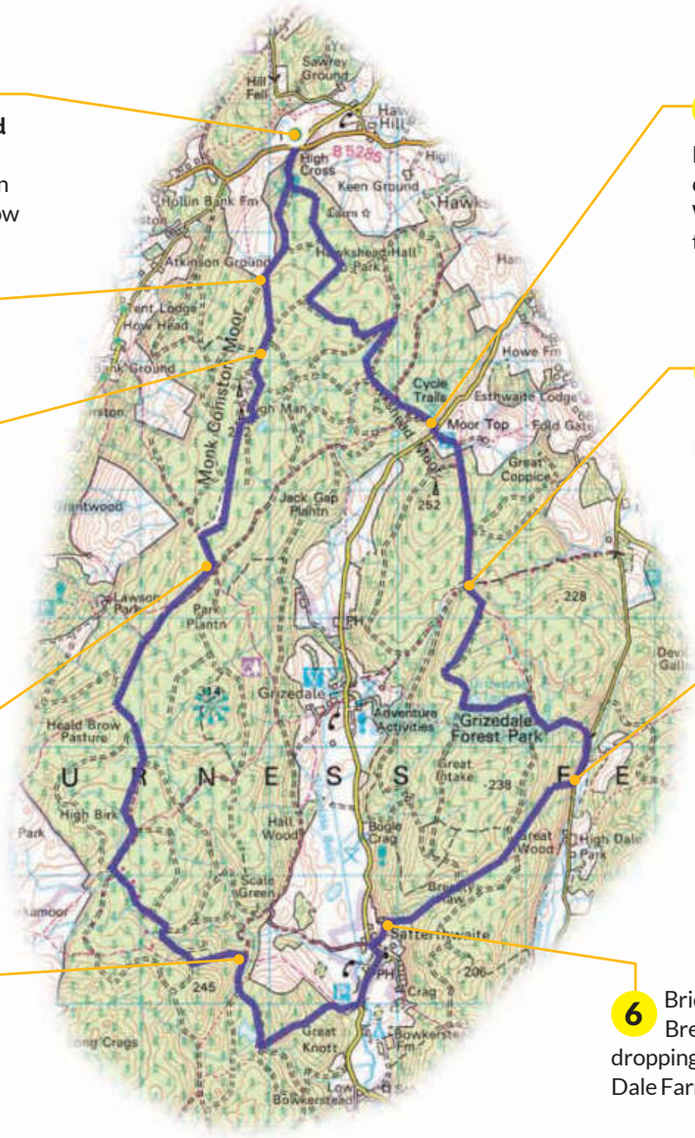
5 Track S for 600m to tarn. Minor public footpath NE to bridleway. E to lane which heads N to Satterthwaite.

6 Bridleway NE climbing Breasty Haw and dropping to lane N of High Dale Farm.

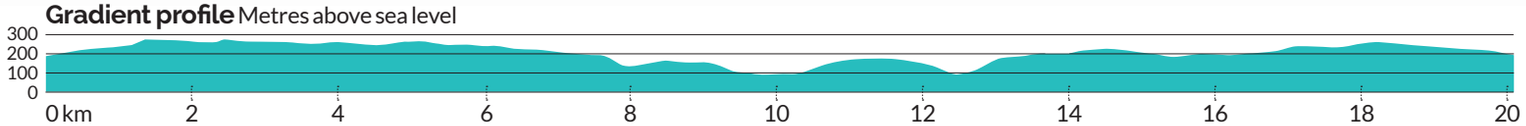
7 Lane N for 300m. Footpath climbing NW then W to track. Track NW for 250m. Track W, turning N past Grizedale Tarn to junction with bridleway. NW for 200m.

8 Public footpath N exiting woods at Moor Top. Track left to road. NE for 100m

9 Head NW up Hawkshead Moor to tarn (1km). Track NNE 500m, track SSW 400m close to tarn again. Track WNW 500m, NE 500m, then tracks NW to return.



Gradient profile Metres above sea level





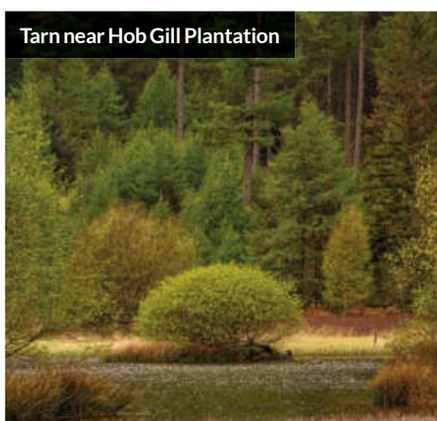
Walked by
Ian Battersby

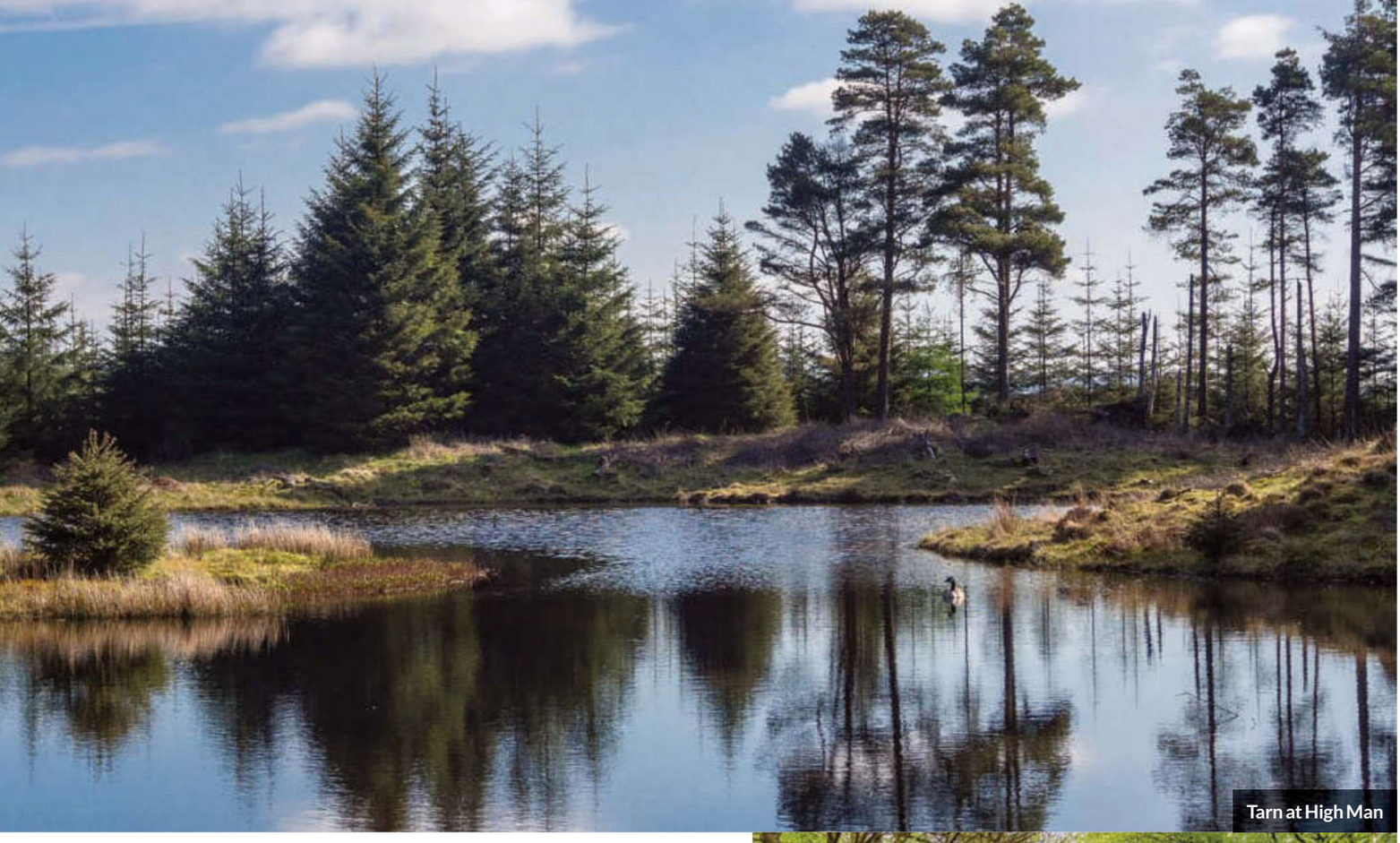
Trading panorama for drama

WITH IDYLLIC WEATHER predicted I yearned for a clamber into the highest fells of the Lake District, but with other folks to consider, we set out for a mosey through Grizedale Forest. It's not that I dislike woodland, I revel in it, but I'd rather visit when mist sags over the tops, robbing the high ground of spectacular panorama.

As we climbed through the first trees, I pined towards the Old Man of Coniston, whimpered at the central fells, but I bit my tongue, and delved deeper into confining conifer, leaving those sweeping views and sulky thoughts behind.

And I was glad I did. To be fair to the navigator, this walk was no cop out. It was designed to cover


Tarn near Hob Gill Plantation



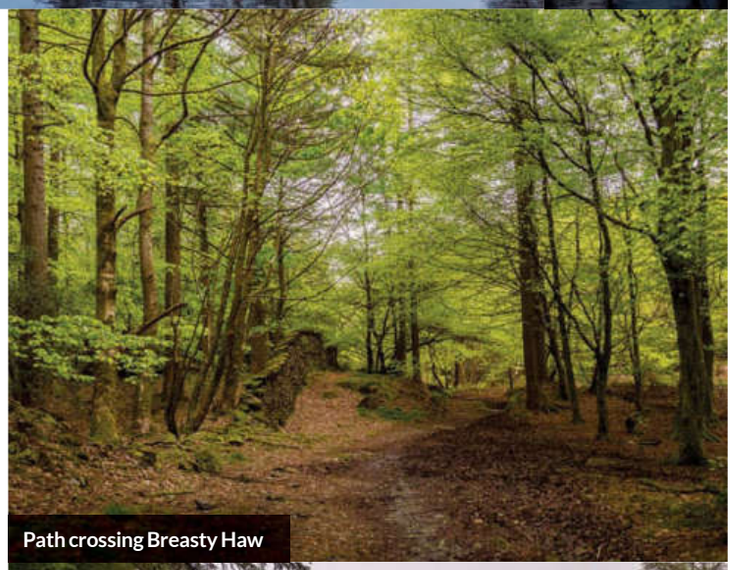
Tarn at High Man

the whole of this considerable forest, aiming to reach a wealth of appealing features. This meant reaching high ground, exploring minor paths, delving into gills and exposing secretive tarns.

Any map of Grizedale Forest Park confirms expectations of acres of pines, and this route doesn't appear to visit many of the smaller deciduous areas shown. That was a worry. I feared the bulldozed tracks and Sitka spruce planted densely to throttle the wood. We did pass through such areas, but most of what we witnessed was indeed mixed woodland, open areas of deciduous regeneration, and paths that intertwined with trees.

As the route continued I warmed greatly to it, and we witnessed a rich variety of wildlife. The woods rang out with cheerful ditties coming from inflated numbers of songbirds, new families flitting about foraging for food. Small, orange tip butterflies were out in numbers too. The finest moment came when we rounded a corner onto clearing, where a cuckoo began to call. It was so loud I knew it was nearby, so we paused, pensive, scouring the area with eager eyes. Then it flew up, landing on a sapling less than 50m away, and resumed its calling. The binoculars revealed the sleek blue-grey back and the barred underparts of an adult in its prime. I have heard many cuckoos, but have only ever seen one before - over 30 years ago. This one seemed to be shadowed by a pipit or a lark.

Each of the twinkling tarns provided a few moments of tranquil repose. Canada geese seemed to value them too. The most astounding section of the route came at Breasty Haws (no sniggering) where the path weaved beneath a translucent beech wood canopy of breathtaking beauty.



Path crossing Breasty Haw



Tarn near Guinea Hill

Further information

Maps: Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Explorer sheet OL7 (The English Lakes South Eastern area); OS 1:50,000 Landranger sheet 96 (Barrow-in-Furness & South Lakeland)

Transport: Coniston Rambler bus 505 to Hawkshead Hill from Kendal, Windermere or Ambleside. Information from www.traveline.info, 0871 2002233

Information: Coniston, 015394 41533

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5

27km/16.5 miles/7 hours
Ascent 540m/1770ft

Maps

Simon Howe, North York Moors ENGLAND

Start:
Grosmont station
(GR: NZ827052)

1 Follow the 'rail trail' out of Grosmont, taking the L fork up past the old school and the church. You'll find yourself following the old railway line past the hamlet of Esk Valley, and eventually into the woods.

2 Where the track divides, with one path following the E bank of the Murk Esk and one crossing the footbridge, take the bridge, then look out for a turning on your R with 'Egton' on the gate.

3 The path winds up through the woods. At eccentric La Rosa campsite, aim to the left of Murk Esk Cottage to pick up the footpath again.

4 When you hit the road, turn left, walk past Struntry Carr, then look for the path on your right. Follow it across Murk Mire Moor.

5 When you emerge on the road to Egton, the footpath continues almost directly opposite (there's a green sign), but it quickly becomes very difficult to follow. Depending on your inclination, you can either use a compass/GPS to find your way through the heather (it is a right of way after all), or to make life easier you can take the road a short way S then pick up a 4x4 access track on your R, which ends up joining the route of the footpath.

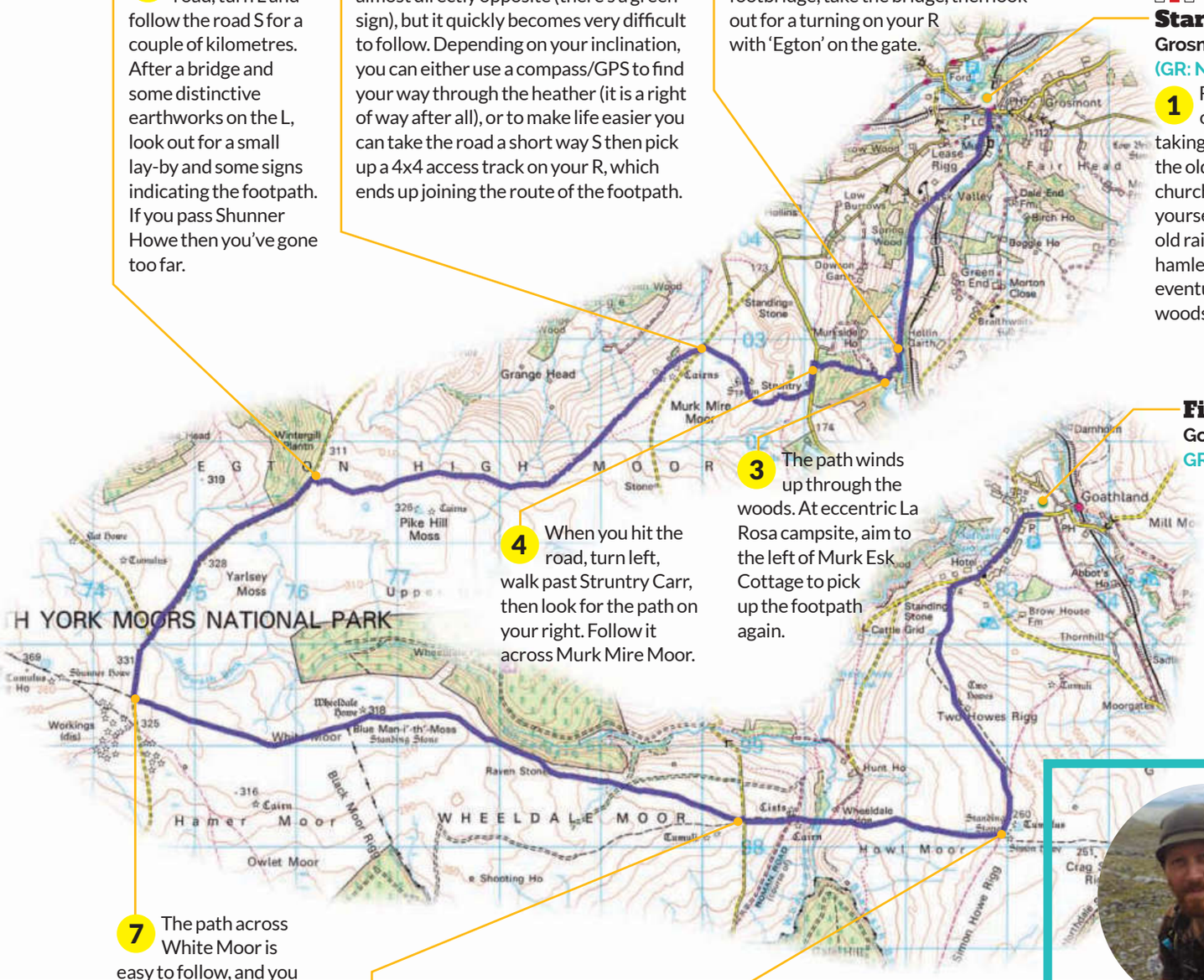
6 At the Glaisdale road, turn L and follow the road S for a couple of kilometres. After a bridge and some distinctive earthworks on the L, look out for a small lay-by and some signs indicating the footpath. If you pass Shunner Howe then you've gone too far.

7 The path across White Moor is easy to follow, and you have the boundary stones, Blue Man i' the Moss and the Raven Stones to reassure you.

8 By the time you reach Wheeldale Road, you can see Simon Howe on the opposite ridge, and it's more or less a dead straight line, crossing the Roman road and descending towards the stepping stones in the valley bottom. In summer the track coming up from the stepping stones can get a bit overgrown, but keep your line and it'll soon get a lot clearer.

9 When you reach the howe, turn L and follow the ridge N, keeping left along Two Howes Rigg. Eventually you'll pass a small tarn, then hop over a hill before descending into Goathland (also known as Aidensfield from blue-rinse classic Heartbeat). From there you can either take the rail trail back to Grosmont (approximately 5km), or return by train/bus.

Finish:
Goathland station
GR: NZ837013





Walked by
Joly Braime

Haunting hilltop barrows

THERE ARE FEW PLACES where the relationship between maps and reality is quite so wobbly as on the North York Moors. Rights of way shift or vanish altogether into the heather, broad access



Simon Howe



White Moor boundary stone



Tups

Further information

Maps: OS 1:25,000 Explorer sheet OL27 (North York Moors – eastern area); OS 1:50,000 Landranger sheet 94 (Whitby & Esk Dale)

Transport: Esk Valley Railway runs trains to Grosmont from Whitby and Middlesbrough, eskvalleyrailway.co.uk; 01947 601987. North York Moors Railway serves both Grosmont and Goathland from Whitby/Pickering (more frequent than Esk Valley trains during the tourist season), nymr.co.uk; 01751 472508. Bus services 99 and Esk Valley Hopper (EVH) run to Grosmont from Whitby, coastalandcountry.co.uk; 01947 602922. Yorkshire Coastliner buses run to Goathland from Leeds, York, Whitby and Malton, yorkbus.co.uk; 01653 692 556

Information: Whitby tourist information centre, 01723 383 636

trails appear across allegedly trackless ground, sheep and gamekeepers carve out all kinds of red herrings, while minor footpaths that look distinctly dubious on paper turn out to be well-worn causeways, visible for miles around. It keeps you on your toes.

Beginning in the pretty, 1940s-looking village of Grosmont on a rainy morning, I followed George Stephenson's old railway line south, before cutting up out of the wooded valley and climbing onto Egton High Moor. At which point the footpath – that reassuring green dashed line on my map – simply disappeared. An inevitable mishap, perhaps, but a compass bearing and a wade through the heather got me to a wide vehicle track that swept in from the east to run alongside the invisible path.

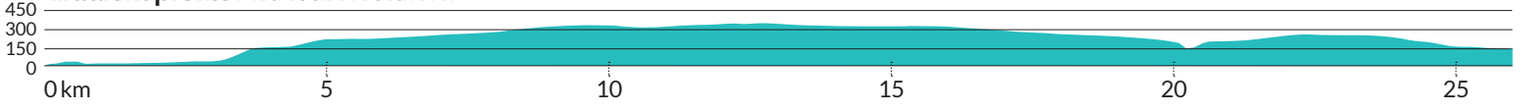
An Instagram search of #northyorkmoors would have you believe that North Yorkshire is a sun-drenched purple wonderland, and indeed it can be, but gleefully vivid place names like Murk Mire Moor and Duckponds Peat Bog hint at another aspect. And actually it can be rather fun to roam the moors in a bit of weather. As I tramped along, I enjoyed the sight of the grizzly, dramatic skies, the wind-battered heather and the rushing, rain-swollen streams, the rich reddish brown water with its thick pale foam looking not unlike gallons of flavoursome Yorkshire bitter.

At the far side of the moor, a shooting party in soggy tweeds milled around their 4x4s with frisky, sodden spaniels, their enthusiasm not dampened by the weather. Only a Labrador with a greying muzzle beheld me forlornly from where he sheltered in the back of a Land Rover, clearly getting a bit old for it all.

A quick march along the quiet moorland road – with the distinctive barrow of Shunner Howe ('lookout hill' in Old Norse) sitting on the horizon – brought me to White Moor, where I followed a line of boundary markers towards the standing stone known as 'Blue Man i' the Moss'. White Moor is a real boot-swallower in places, and I can only imagine what it was like in the 1970s, when thousands of people a year traversed this boggy stretch as part of the Lyke Wake Walk – the Three Peaks Challenge of its day.

Crossing the remains of Wheeldale Roman Road, it was on up to the distinctive hilltop monument of Simon Howe, just in time for the sun to show its face. Everyone has their favourite viewpoint on the North York Moors, and this is mine, the panorama made all the more affecting by the knowledge that people have been gazing out from here since prehistory. If you ignore the big modern cairn – a kind of hikers' vandalism – then the standing stones, barrows and stone circle are reminders that you're stood among the graves and sacred places of a long-forgotten world. It's a grand place to feel very small.

Gradient profile Metres above sea level



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6

28km/17.5 miles/9 hours

Ascent 475m / 1560 feet



Maps

Stoodley Pike and Blackstone Edge, West Yorkshire: South Pennines: ENGLAND



Start / Finish: Lay-by on E side of A6033, by Rochdale Canal, GR: SD931228

1 From lay-by take Hollins Road, immediately fork backwards onto Knowlwood Road, then fork R onto Lumbutts Road. Walk uphill for 1.4km, then fork R on track and take path on L.

2 Path contours above farm and below Heeley Hill to meet track by gate with Open Access signs. Walk E on paved pathway, then NE for 1.5km to Stoodley Pike.

3 Retrace route and follow Pennine Way (PW) for 2.5km to junction of paths. Cross drain and walk SE to summit at Little Holder Stones. Continue S to Little Dove Lowe, join path along reservoir, turn L to join PW after 700m. Walk S for approx 3.2km to reach A58.

4 Turn R for 250m and cross road. Turn L on PW, walk uphill for 1km to Aiggin Stone, continue S onto Blackstone Edge. After trig point follow PW for 0.5km, turn SW over Hoar Edge, drop N to wall by Lode Nab and turn L across marshy ground to reach track after 700m.

5 Cross stream, take track on L (past golf course). Turn L at stone footbridge to descend into woodland and join lane into Littleborough. At houses, take R fork over canal, turn L to reach towpath or train station.

6 Join towpath and walk N back to start



Walked by **Roger Butler**

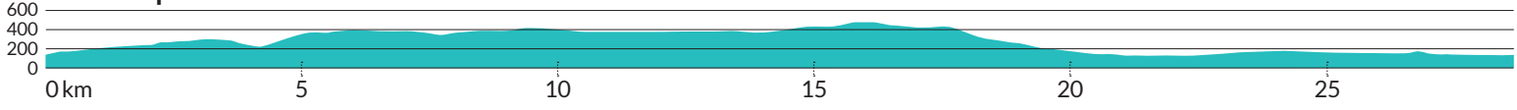
"There's still fog o'er the rest of Yorkshire"

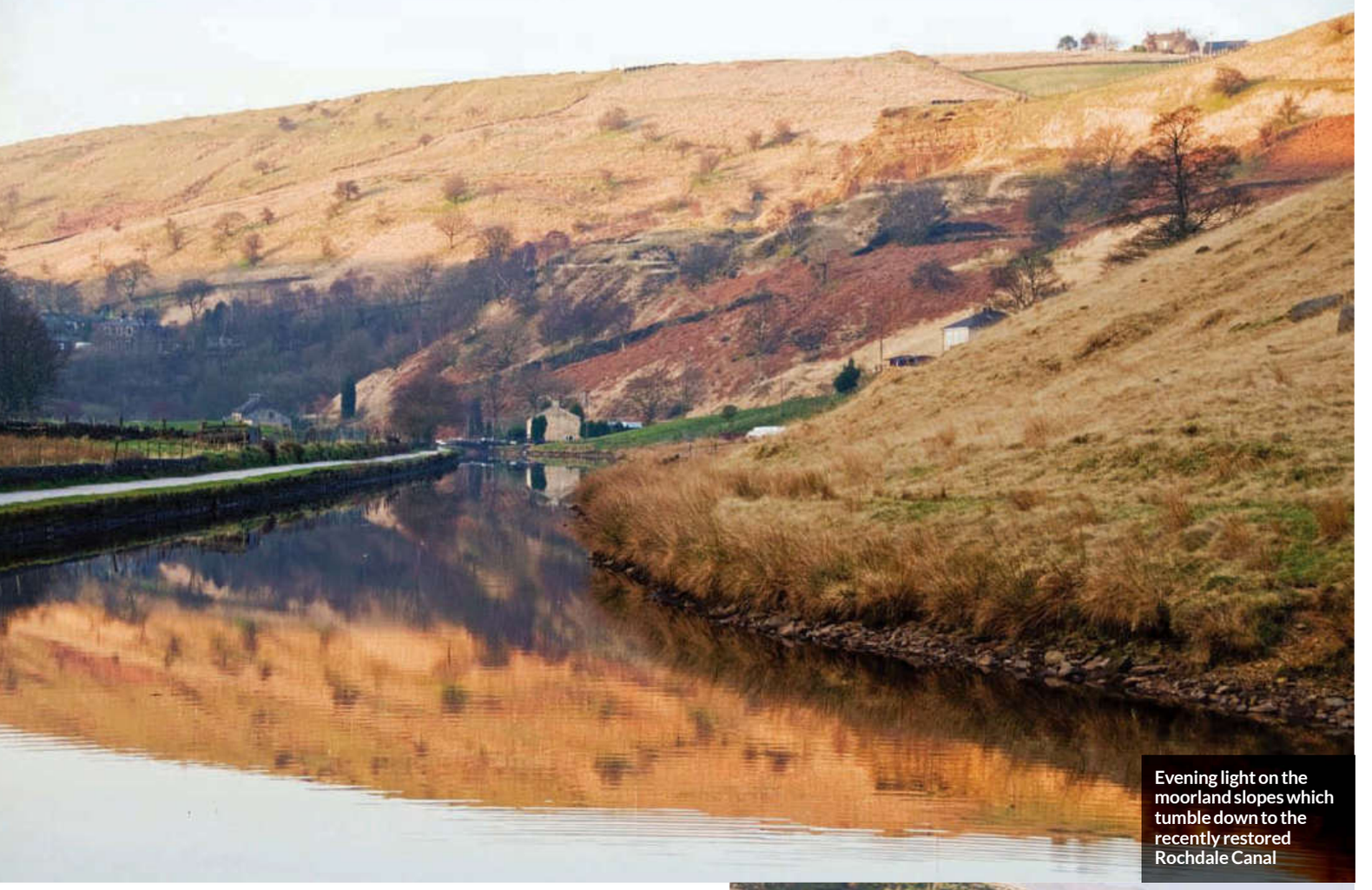
THE MORNING FORECAST proudly proclaimed that a thermometer had already reached 12°C in the Cairngorms, but the mist hanging over the border between Lancashire and Yorkshire was cold and dank. Pockets of fresh frosty air occasionally punctured the clag and offered views across the Rochdale Canal to steep brown slopes mottled like the skin of an adder. Large patches of heather resembled the sort of blobs you might find in a nursery school painting whilst the old higgledy piggledy weavers' cottages told of the toil and the industry that once took place around Todmorden.

The lane climbed past sturdy barns with broad stone lintels and jumbles of old machinery. Above the haze, a watery sun became a silver sixpence and the light bounced off the shards of wool which hung from strands of barbed wire. A maze of walls and steep ravines were revealed as light and warmth slowly crept across the hillside.

Blue skies had arrived by the time I contoured above Mankinholes, where a traditional paved causeway climbed the

Gradient profile Metres above sea level





Evening light on the moorland slopes which tumble down to the recently restored Rochdale Canal

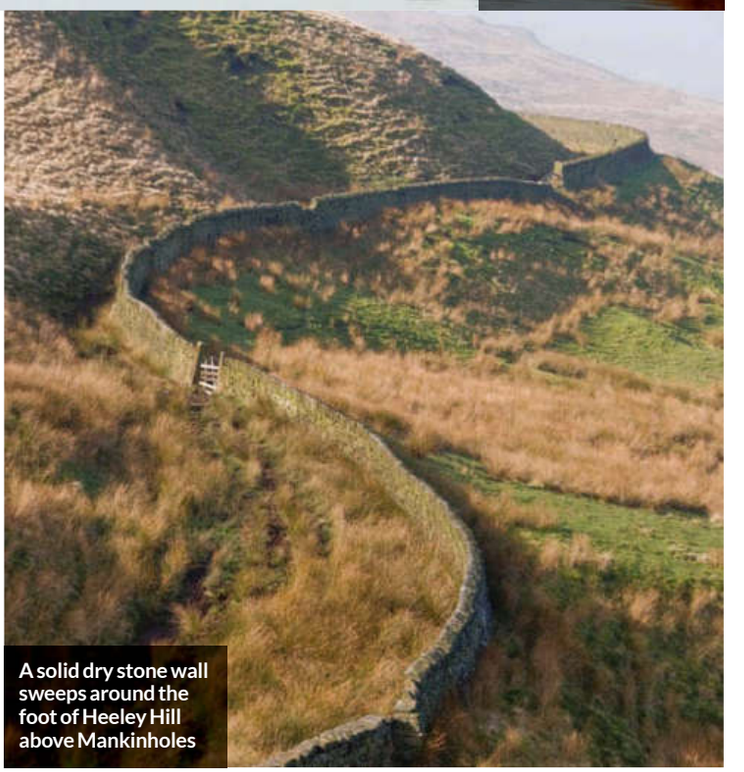
sharp slope ahead. No two stones were the same and an artist would have found it hard to replicate the smoothly shaped hollows that had been worn by centuries of continuous foot leather.

Squabbling grouse welcomed me to Stoodley Pike and its tall spaceship-shaped monument which was built (and later rebuilt) to commemorate the defeat of Napoleon. A pitch dark stairway led up to the fine viewing balcony and I chatted to a local hiker: "You don't get many days when it's not windy up here. Look, there's still fog o'er the rest of Yorkshire."

I took lunch on great slabs of gritstone, next to a dazzling white trig point, from where rich green sphagnum crept down to a reservoir that shone like a mirror. Wispy golden grass was the colour of old fashioned haystacks and the low water levels revealed large rocks and tiny sandy beaches. The Pennine Way, in the form of a well maintained promenade, wriggled past more reservoirs and looked out to the empty moors in the west.

To the north, the distant M62 was an angry conveyor belt which seemed to carry warring tribes across the top of the Pennines. In the not too distant past, vehicles would have been few and far between up here and the 30,000 Chartists who gathered on breezy Blackstone Edge in August 1846 overcame a long march before demanding a better life for the people who worked in the mills at the foot of the hills. A newspaper report said that many protestors had walked thirty miles or more in order "to renew their covenant with their fellow men" and, by the top of the rocky jumbled edge, I allowed myself a few pensive moments to think about times gone by.

Boggy ground swung west from the summit and I headed for a pudding-shaped hill by a tight little valley. Half an hour later I tumbled, almost literally, onto the canalside and spun a coin: "Heads, I'll catch the train; tails, I'll follow the towpath". I won the toss and four miles of glorious waterway heritage escorted me back to Walsden.



A solid dry stone wall sweeps around the foot of Heeley Hill above Mankinholes

Further information

Maps: OS Explorer 1:25,000, Sheet OL21: South Pennines

Transport: Stations at Walsden and Todmorden are close to the start; Littleborough station, by the canal, provides an option to shorten the walk, or buses T6 and T8 could also be used – see www.wymetro.com for details

Information: Todmorden TIC, 01706 818181

Always take a map and compass with you. ©Crown copyright 2015 Ordnance Survey. Media 062/15

7

17km/10.5 miles/6 hours
Ascent 350m/1150ft

Maps

Gwytherin, Conwy WALES

Note: Parking in Gwytherin is extremely limited. You may be able to come to an agreement with the landlord of the Lion Inn but please do not park here without asking first. Otherwise park outside the village and walk in.

Start/Finish
The village square, Gwytherin GR: SH876614

1 From the village square take the marked Pilgrims' Way W through oak woodland to the farmstead Pen-y-graig. From here follow the farm track NW to open moorland.

2 At the wire fence turn S. Here you can elect to follow the fence line, using it as a handrail, or cut a few corners by following a bearing of 184° (just off S) to reach the farm gate onto the minor road crossing the moor E-W.

3 Walk W on the minor road for 200m until another farm gate is reached, this time on the S side of the road. Enter the moorland here but resist the temptation to follow the obvious track (which will lead you down hill to Pennant). Instead, be brave and take a bearing exactly S for 2.5km to reach Moel Seisiog (this will involve crossing a fence and a stream – the trig point is accessed by a gate on the south side of the intersection of fences at SH861573).

4 From Moel Seisiog head on a bearing of 134° to reach Penbryn-ci (there are gates in the fences if you look carefully for them, but off the direct bearing).

5 From Penbryn-ci keep to the higher ground for as long as you can to avoid the worst of the boggy ground, roughly following a bearing of 80° to reach Ty'n-llyn on the north shore of Llyn Alwen.

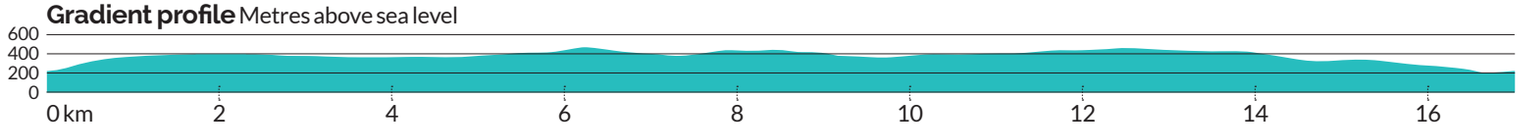
6 From Ty'n-llyn follow the wire fence bearing 14° for 1km over Moel Llyn to what is marked on the OS map as a plantation. When I was here there was not a tree in sight! Dog-leg 300m W then head across open ground NW to the obvious farm track at SH897582.

7 Follow the farm track as it winds northwards for 2.5km until the track forks. Take the left-hand fork heading NNW downhill to the abandoned farmstead of Gors.

8 Take the path to the north of Gors which heads W, but take care as the path is not well defined on the ground and you may need to use boundary fences as handrails. Ultimately, keep heading W to Bryn-tan farm, then to Pont-y-Felin, taking the B5384 for 300m back to the centre of Gwytherin.



Gradient profile Metres above sea level





Walked by
Andrew Galloway

How not to lose your head on the Pilgrims' Way

IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT the late Alfred Wainwright had a particular dislike of large groups of walkers plodding through his beloved Lakeland fells, churning up footpaths and generally making far too much noise; and yet ironically no-one has done more over the past 50 or so years to popularise the pastime of walking on the moorlands and mountains of Britain. Such is the conundrum of the outdoor writer: in our desire to share with others our love for the peaceful and isolated places we experience, we run the risk of making them more popular, inundated with curious walkers and thus, destroying part of the very magic of the location that drew us there in the first place and so leaving us conflicted.

So did I feel upon my first visit to Gwytherin, a somnambulant little village where the presence of an unfamiliar vehicle can still elicit curious glances from the local residents. Although just seven miles as-the-crow-flies to the east of Betws-y-Coed in



Cairn on Penbryn-ci



Wind turbines on Moel Maelogen



Trig point on Moel Seisiog



Lone tree on open moorland above Llyn Alwen

Further information

Maps: Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Snowdon/Yr Wyddfa OL17

Transport: Very limited buses between and Llanrwst and Gwytherin

Information: Betws y Coed Information Centre
Address: Snowdonia National Park Information Centre, Betws y Coed, Conwy, LL24 0AH,
Telephone: 01690 710426,
e-mail:TIC.BYC@eryri-npa.gov.uk

Accommodation: Camping: Riverside, Old Church Rd, Betws-y-Coed, 01690 710310
B&B accommodation: The Royal Oak Hotel, Holyhead Road, Betws-y-Coed, 01690 710219 or 01690 710011, www. hotel -snowdonia.co.uk

the peaceful vale of Cledwen, Gwytherin is a million miles from that flesh-pot of Augusta Hall gift shops and coach-tour crimplene. The village church is dedicated to Saint Winefride, or Gwenfrewi, as she is known in Welsh. Gwenfrewi rejected the amorous advances of Caradoc Freidfras, a local chieftain, who in his dejected rage, raped and decapitated her, a spring of water miraculously appearing where her rolling head came to rest. The site of this shocking crime, now St Winefride's Well in the market town of Holywell, Flintshire, became a place of pilgrimage and remains so to this day. Thankfully, Gwenfrewi's uncle, Saint Beuno, was on hand to replace her severed head and restore her to life: phew!

After all the excitement, Gwenfrewi decided to settle for the quiet life, becoming a nun (well, who can blame her?) and eventually taking the position of Abbess at Gwytherin Abbey where she lived until her second death, on this occasion of natural causes.

Thus, the North Wales Pilgrims' Way passes through Gwytherin on its journey from Holywell in the east to Bardsey Island in the west, known as the island of 20,000 saints because of its association with Saint Cadfan and medieval pilgrimage. However, on the day I climbed my way through the much overgrown oak woodland to the west of the village, one would assume few pilgrims had passed this way recently.

Out on the open moorland there are windfarms, as controversial as ever and certainly not popular with the local residents: giant monopods striding across the landscape (can monopods stride?) as if from some 1970s science fiction movie, but very much present day science fact. Footpath furniture is sparse up on these moorlands, situated in the no-man's-land between Conwy and Denbighshire, and often poorly maintained; rural poverty having ensured that the needs of Sunday walkers from the industrial conurbations of north-west England, who contribute little to the local economy, are not treated as a priority.

This is not the Ordovician volcanic caldera landscape of Capel Curig; these moorlands are bleak and featureless, requiring the skilled use of a compass to navigate across and are best avoided after heavy rain. But should you be prepared to suffer such asceticism and make it as far as Penbryn-ci, you will be rewarded with the experience of a landscape as empty and as spiritually fulfilling as any I know in North Wales.

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8

14km/9 miles/4 hours
Ascent 513m/1680ft



Maps

The Quantocks, Somerset ENGLAND

Start/Finish
Start/Finish: Nether Stowey
GR: ST192397

1 From Nether Stowey Post Office, follow the Coleridge Way up Castle Street leading onto a wooded path beside a small stream.

2 At the path intersection, leave the Coleridge Way and go straight across into Bin Combe

3 Turn left onto the road and walk to a junction with the parking area of Dead Woman's Ditch

4 Opposite Dead Woman's Ditch parking area, take the well established track/ bridleway heading in a westerly direction towards Black Hill

5 Optional detour to Wilmot's Pool, 150m

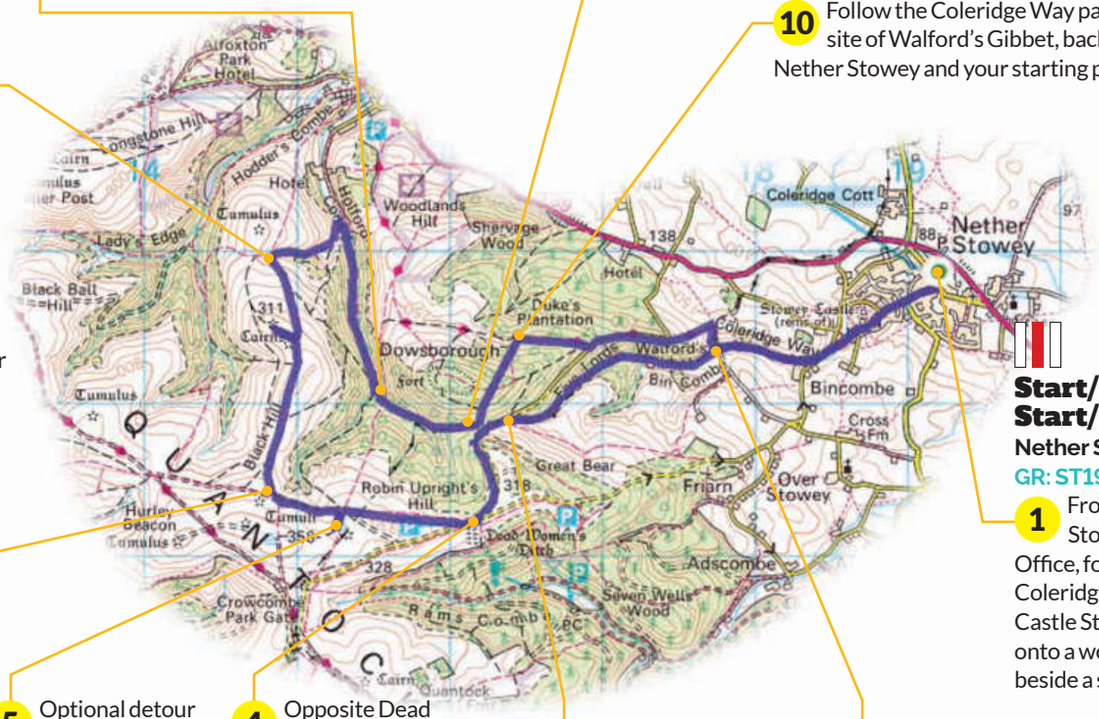
6 Take the track heading N towards Higher Hare Knap

7 Turn east, dropping downhill from open moorland into the picturesque valley of Holford Combe. Choose your favourite path either side of the stream as you meander up the valley.

8 A wide flat area with converging paths gives way to Lady's Combe heading steeply uphill. It can be confusing here so check you're in the right area by looking out for the bridleway joining from the north before taking the path climbing uphill on the L side of the stream.

9 Just before the road, take a path heading NE climbing uphill to the east of the old fort (optional detour of approx 1km around the fort). Drop down through the woods to rejoin the Coleridge Way.

10 Follow the Coleridge Way past the site of Walford's Gibbet, back into Nether Stowey and your starting point.



Gradient profile Metres above sea level





Walked by
Jacquie Budd

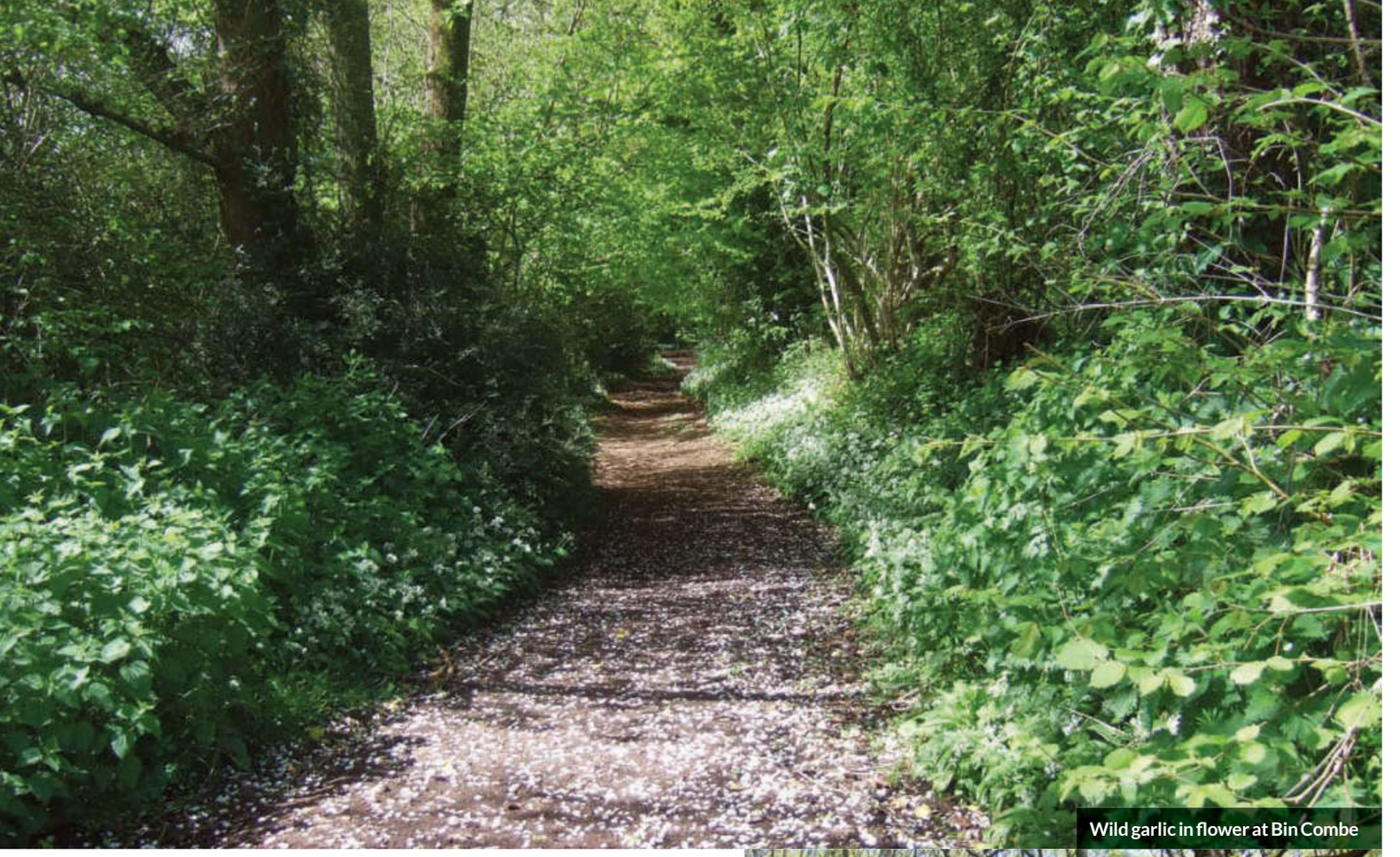
In Coleridge's footsteps

SPANNING JUST TWELVE miles by four, the Quantock Hills in Somerset pack plenty into a compact area.

Designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in 1956, the scenery here is stunning, with steep wooded valleys (combes), open moors and cultivated farmland. Add in red deer, wild ponies, an old fort, plus a gruesome 18th Century tale and there's plenty to whet the appetite.

I started my walk in the village of Nether Stowey, once home to the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (now a National Trust site open to the public) and where he wrote "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". I left the village on the waymarked Coleridge Way, a 51-mile footpath crossing the Quantocks and Exmoor from Nether Stowey to Lynmouth.

Before long, I left the Coleridge Way to walk up the wooded valley of Bin Combe, the start of which is a haven in May for visitors who love wild garlic. Climbing steadily, the path emerged onto a road,



Wild garlic in flower at Bin Combe

leading to a parking area near the chilling-sounding "Dead Woman's Ditch". I was relieved to learn that the name hailed from the late 1780s, when local charcoal burner John Walford murdered his wife, and not from a more recent incident!

Turning away from Dead Woman's Ditch, I followed a defined track towards Black Hill (358m) with spectacular views across open moorland and wooded combes. I made a short detour to visit Wilmot's Pool and was lucky to encounter a couple of grazing wild Exmoor ponies.

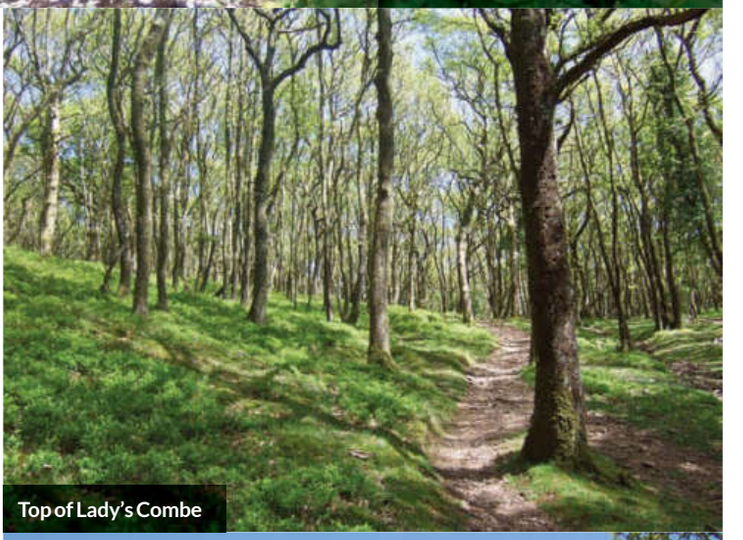
Underneath Black Hill, I turned north following a wide ridge to Higher Hare Knap (312m), where a well established cairn provided a great picnic spot with stunning 360-degree views.

Dropping down into Holford Combe, the terrain changed from wild open moorland into a picturesque wooded valley. The path meandered pleasantly alongside a stream, with choices on either side meaning I could wander wherever looked the most interesting.

Leaving the river, I climbed steeply up Lady's Combe where a path at the top took me over a hill back to the Coleridge Way. However, before dropping down the hill, I couldn't resist another detour – this time to walk around the site of an old fort. While the trees have long since overtaken the site, the old moat is still visible and I found a wonderful view out over the Bristol Channel, with glimpses of the Welsh coastline.

Returning to my path, I dropped back onto the Coleridge Way and headed east through the woods to reach the area of Walford's Gibbet (linked to the aforementioned John Walford).

Staying on the Coleridge Way, I returned to Nether Stowey with a choice of pub or tea room to finish.



Top of Lady's Combe



Looking towards the Bristol Channel from the old hilltop fort

Further information

Maps: OS Explorer 140 Quantock Hills and Bridgwater 1:25,000

Transport: Nearest train station at Bridgwater (approx 8 miles) Bus service from Bridgwater – Webber Bus No. 24 www.webberbus.com

Information: Taunton Visitor Centre 01823 340 470, tauntontic@tauntondeane.gov.uk

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9

21km/13 miles/6-7 hours
Ascent 555m/1820ft

Maps

Soussons, Corndon and Hamel Downs
Dartmoor ENGLAND

Start/Finish
Bennet's Cross CP
GR: SX681817

1 From the car park near Bennet's Cross, follow a winding path downhill through a tin-mined landscape

2 Soon after entering the wood, take a R turn, signed to Soussons Farm

3 At Soussons Farm, take the track opposite the gate, signed 'Road near Grendon', and follow this to the road, where you turn R.

4 After about 500m, take a track L, off-road, soon turning left again (signed 'Bridlepath'), to walk across the fields. Don't be tempted to follow the new farm track through the wood.

5 Turn L on meeting the road, heading up over Corndon Down, keeping to high ground to find a path leading to the cairns.

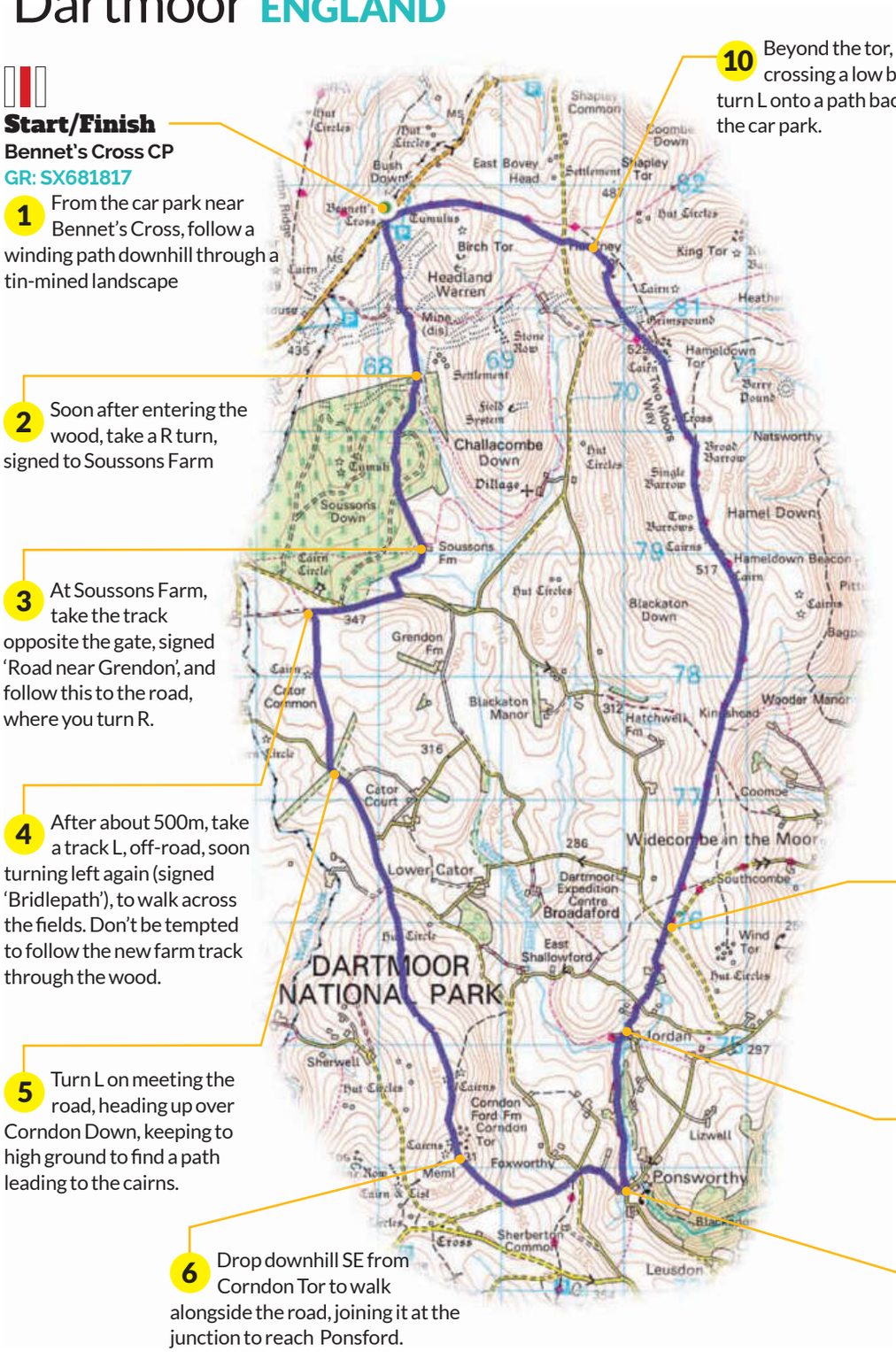
6 Drop downhill SE from Corndon Tor to walk alongside the road, joining it at the junction to reach Ponsford.

7 Just before the stream, turn L at the end of a cottage, signed 'Jodan', and then follow the Two Moors Way alongside the stream.

8 At Jordan, take the road uphill (perhaps diverging slightly to visit the abandoned medieval village of Hutholes – signed).

9 At the crossroads, take to the moor, following the Two Moors Way over Hamel Down, deviating at Hameldown Tor to follow the path through Grimspound and up to Hookney Tor.

10 Beyond the tor, on crossing a low bank, turn L onto a path back to the car park.



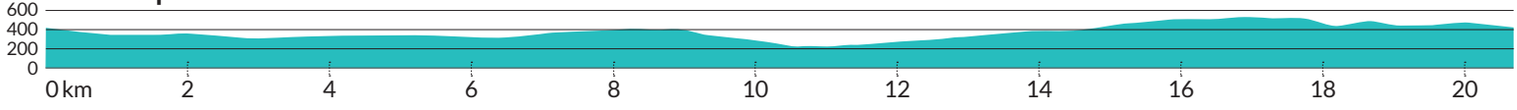


Walked by
Tim Gent

It's all about the colours

ASKED AT THE END OF this walk which bit I'd enjoyed most, I struggled a little for an answer. There had been a very cute foal, struggling to its brand new legs on the north slope of Corndon Down. Foals are always hard to beat. Then there was the woodland trail, winding alongside the West Webburn River. Even in its bare winter state, this

Gradient profile Metres above sea level





Dartmoor ponies on Hamel Down

slightly muddy stretch of hazel, holly and oak flanked path was pretty spectacular. The stream rushed nearby between rounded granite stones, before swirling into some surprisingly deep pools, the sunlight reflected gold off the sand at the bottom.

A plethora of archaeology remains vied for attention along almost the entire route. Right from the start, on leaving the medieval cross at the car park, a great expanse of ground had been altered completely by long-abandoned tin mining. A team of mechanical diggers building a modern 4WD training course couldn't have done a more thorough and impressive job.

After this upheaval, there then followed huge Bronze Age cairns, a deserted medieval village, a collapsed stone beacon and hut circles, the whole route criss-crossed by the low banks of some truly vast prehistoric field systems. This walks also runs right through the centre of Grimspound, possibly the best-preserved and most impressive pre-Roman settlement on the moor.

In spite of all this, including the simple exhilaration of striding across wide open spaces, it was the colours that provided the star turn of the walk for me.

Lit by a low sun, the slopes above Widdecombe, seen to the east from Hamel Down, were simply breathtaking. In broad, distinct and very bright bands, these leapt from emerald green across the grass fields near the valley bottom, to the burnt orange of dead bracken on the slopes above. Then, over a bold horizon dotted by the stone eruptions of Honeybag, Chinkwell and Hound Tors, the blue of the sky stepped in, deepening in hue as it soared up and overhead. Even the ponies in the foreground were forgotten for a while.



Approaching Grimspound



Corndon Down

Further information

Maps: OS 1:25,000 Explorer sheet OL28 (Dartmoor)

Transport: Various services: Devon Traveline (08712 002233) for options

Information: Princetown (01822 890414)

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10 24km/15 miles/6-7 hours

Ascent 878m/2880ft



Maps

Dark Peak pub walk, Peak District, ENGLAND



Walked by **Daniel Neilson**

The long walk over Win Hill and the edges of Kinder Scout can either start in Castleton or Hope. Point 1 of the route below starts from YHA Castleton Losehill Hall.

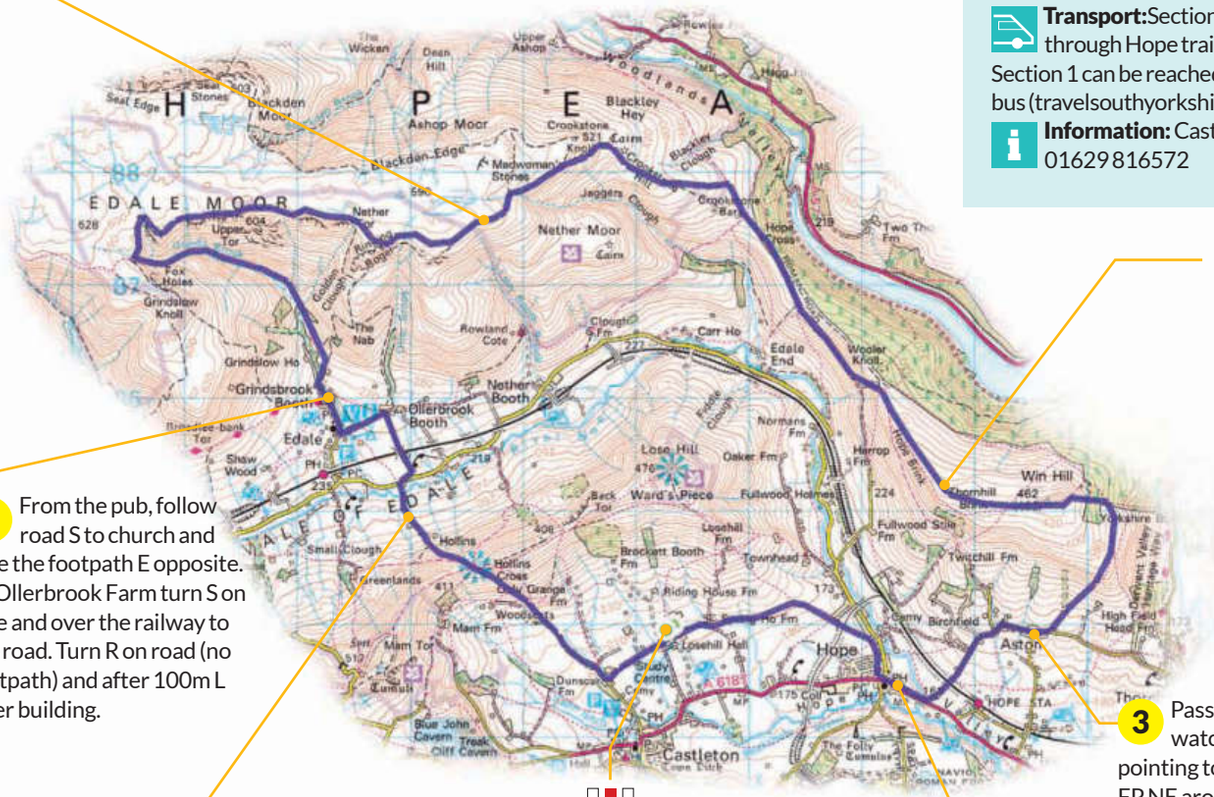
Don't miss the accompanying feature on 38

Further information

Maps: Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Landranger sheet 110 (Sheffield & Huddersfield); 1:25,000 Explorer sheet OL1 (Peak District – Dark Peak Area); Harveys 1:40,000 British Mountain Maps (Dark Peak)

Transport: Section 2 of the walk passes through Hope train station. The YHA at Section 1 can be reached from Hope via the 272 bus (travelsouthyorkshire.com; 01709 515151)

Information: Castleton TIC, 01629 816572



5 Continue to skirt Kinder Scout W. Don't descend too far at Ringing Roger, keep an eye out for the large cairns continuing NW, over Golden Clough, and generally W to the top of Grindsbrook Clough. It's a bit of a scramble at the top (easier to come up than go down), but flattens out. Follow the path to the Old Nag's Head pub in Edale.

6 From the pub, follow road S to church and take the footpath E opposite. At Ollerbrook Farm turn S on lane and over the railway to the road. Turn R on road (no footpath) and after 100m L after building.

7 Take footpath SE to Hollins Cross and down the other side, still bearing SE. At the foot, take lane S to the Training & Conference Centre. If going to Castleton continue straight, otherwise turn L back to Losehill Hall.

Start/Finish

Losehill Hall GR: SK153838

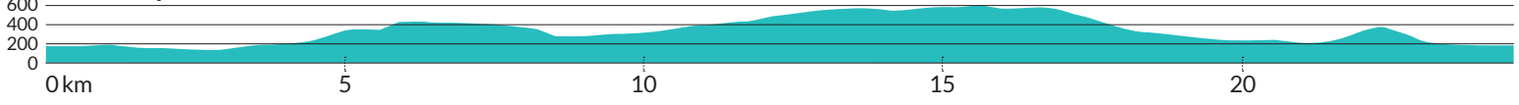
1 Walk through the gate at the back of the car park and turn R onto the foothpath. Continue past Spring House Farm, and at next junction, follow signs into Hope, past the school and to the main road.

2 Walk out of Hope E, over the River Noe, and turn R onto the lane heading towards Aston.

3 Pass Aston Hall, and watch out for a signpost pointing to Win Hill. Follow the FP NE around the hill. On the E side, take the L fork into Winhill Plantation. A clear FP ascends to Winhill Pike and a trig point.

4 Follow the footpath NW downhill to meet the Roman Road. Just after it touched the plantation is a cross roads at SK159876. Continue NW to a path leading uphill W after 300m. The path climbs W then NW before ascending SW to the path that circuits Kinder Scout.

Gradient profile Metres above sea level



11

15 km/9.5 miles/4 hours
Ascent 661m/2168ft



Maps

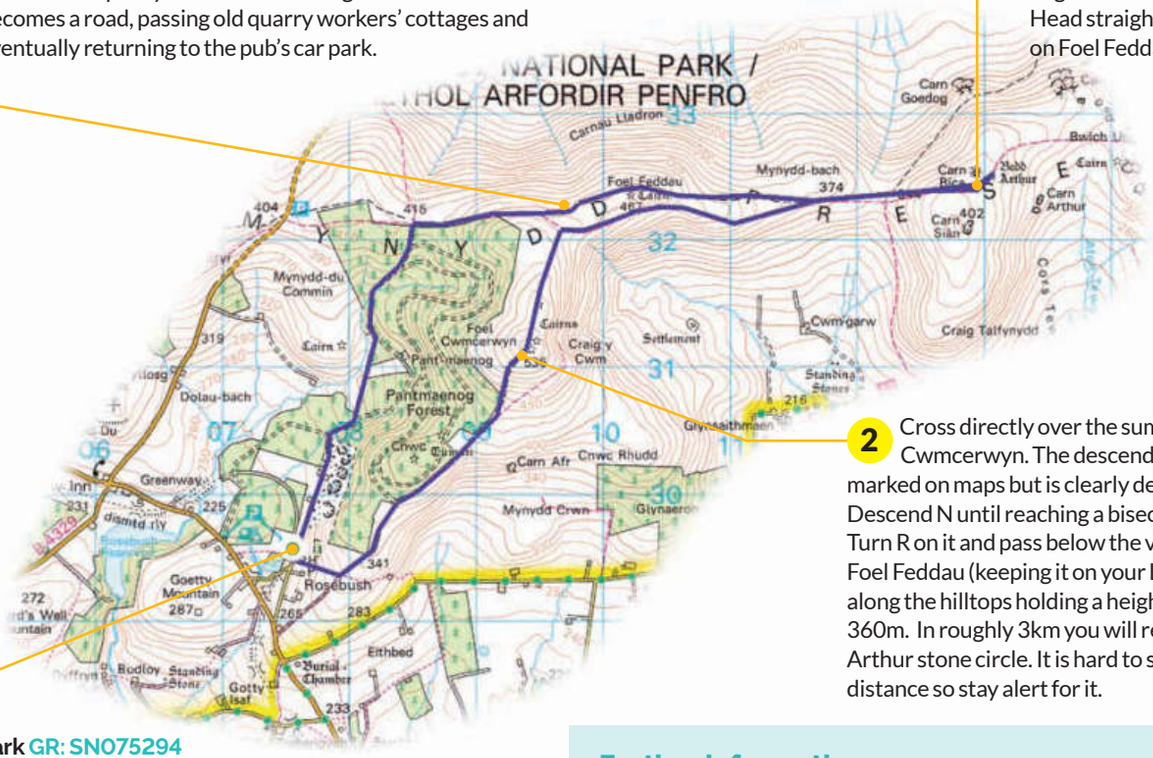
Tafarn Sinc pub walk, Preseli Hills WALES

Tafarn Sinc is the highest pub in the Preseli Hills at 264m. It provides an ideal starting point for climbing the highest hill in the range, the 536m Foel Cwmcerwyn. Not only does this route offer views of all three of Pembrokeshire's coastlines, but on a good day you'll see all the way to Lundy Island, Snowdon, and potentially even Ireland. Part of the walk follows along the 'Golden Road', believed to have once been a trade superhighway in Neolithic times.

Don't miss the accompanying feature on 26



Walked by
Will Renwick



4 Continue W over the summit and to the edge of the forestry (now largely cut back). Continue along its edge until the signpost and gateway. There, enter into the forested area and join the gravel track following it downhill. After roughly 1.5km continue on the track past the old slate quarry and ruined buildings. The track soon becomes a road, passing old quarry workers' cottages and eventually returning to the pub's car park.

3 At the stones turn back and retrace your steps until the path forks R. This time keep on the track on the northern edge of the ridgeway. Head straight to the cairn on Foel Feddau.

2 Cross directly over the summit of Foel Cwmcerwyn. The descending path isn't marked on maps but is clearly defined. Descend N until reaching a bisecting path. Turn R on it and pass below the visible cairn of Foel Feddau (keeping it on your L). Continue along the hilltops holding a height of around 360m. In roughly 3km you will reach Bedd Arthur stone circle. It is hard to spot from a distance so stay alert for it.

Start/Finish

Tafarn Sinc carpark GR: SN075294

1 Turn L out of Tafarn Sinc carpark and at the footpath sign across the lane enter the field. Head uphill through it. Eventually the footpath crosses over a fence and onto a bridleway. Turn L on it and follow the clear track for roughly 1km on the edge of the forestry. Be prepared for some boggy areas. When the path forks keep L heading directly uphill.

Further information

Maps: Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Landranger sheet 145 (Cardigan & Mynydd Preseli); OS 1:25,000 Explorer sheet OL35 (North Pembrokeshire).

Transport: Trains to Fishguard (03333 211202, arrivatrainswales.co.uk). The 345 bus from Fishguard to Mynachlog-ddu serves Rosebush (01437 764551, pembrokeshire.gov.uk).

Information: Fishguard Tourist Information 01437 776636.

Gradient profile Metres above sea level



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Age on 13 May 2016 Number of Challenges completed

Please give years

Unsuccessful crossings (give years)

Signed

If you would prefer not to receive marketing material from The Great Outdoors Magazine and the event's sponsors and partners, please tick here ☐

Title (Mr/Mrs etc)

Name

Address

Postcode

Telephone

Mobile

Email

Age on 13 May 2016 Number of Challenges completed

Please give years

Unsuccessful crossings (give years)

Signed

If you would prefer not to receive marketing material from The Great Outdoors Magazine and the event's sponsors and partners, please tick here ☐

*The entry fee for 2016 is £50 per person. Please make your payment via the TGO online shop at **shop.kelsey.co.uk/product/TGOCHALLENGE**. You will be given an account code to quote on your form. After making your payment and completing your form, please return the form, uncut, to **Sue Oxley and Ali Ogden, TGOC Coordinators, Newtonmore Hostel, Main Street, Newtonmore, PH20 1DA**, by Monday 31 October 2015 at the latest, or scan and email to **tgoc@newtonmorehostel.co.uk**. All applicants must sign the form. If you are unable to make an online payment then please post a cheque (payable to Kelsey Publishing Ltd).

THE GREAT OUTDOORS CHALLENGE 2016 EXPERIENCE FORM

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To be completed by all new applicants and those who have not completed a crossing for three years

Please complete one form for each first-time applicant (or those who have not completed a crossing for three years). Additional forms can be downloaded from the website at **www.tgomagazine.co.uk/challenge**.

Your answers will help us assess your application and may later assist vetters to determine your route's suitability. Please answer them honestly and in full. Challengers who have not completed a crossing for three years or more should detail their most recent backpacking experience, since their last successful crossing. Inadequate information might lead to an application being refused.

Name of applicant

Why do you want to participate in the The Great Outdoors Challenge?

Do you intend to carry a tent or other shelter on your crossing? Yes/No

What average daily distance do you expect to cover?

Please describe your typical backpacking trip, including typical areas, times of year, duration, distance etc, and anything else you consider relevant.

Even those completing the Challenge in groups could find themselves walking solo sections. Please describe any experience you have of solo backpacking.

What are the longest backpacking trips you have undertaken?

Summarise your experience of navigating over trackless, rugged hill country in poor visibility.

High-level routes over the mountains can involve crossing snow, even in May. Please summarise your winter walking experience, including use of ice axe and crampons.

It is not essential to have backpacked in Scotland before completing the Challenge but knowledge of whether you have done so will help us assess the suitability of your route. Please use this space to summarise any experience you have of backpacking in Scotland.

Please provide any other information you feel is relevant.

Rise to the Challenge!

Whether you're a newcomer or a veteran, these notes explain all you need to know about entering The Great Outdoors Challenge 2016. Study them carefully before completing the form – several changes have been made since last year.

Entering the Challenge

- The 36th Great Outdoors Challenge will be held between 13 and 27 May 2016. Challengers will start over the weekend of 13-16 May and must complete by 5pm on 27 May.
- Entry is limited to 300, plus a small number of associates, sponsors and partners.
- The Challenge is a self-supported backcountry walk across Scotland, west coast to east. Challengers are responsible for planning their own routes, which are checked by experienced vetters. The vetters' comments may assist in final planning. Full details, along with route planning notes, are sent to all successful applicants.
- There will be 13 signing-out points along the west coast of Scotland, strung between Torridon and Ardrishaig. Challengers can finish anywhere between Fraserburgh and Arbroath on the east coast.
- The minimum age for entering is 18. There is no maximum age though we strongly recommend that older Challengers have a full medical check-up before entering, ensuring that their medical professional is aware of the nature of the event. You should obtain specific medical advice if you suffer from any chronic condition or are unsure about your physical ability to take part. It will be a requirement to complete a confidential medical information form and to inform the Coordinators of any change in your health prior to the event.
- The Challenge can be completed solo or in groups of up to four people. If intending to walk with a partner or group, entries must be submitted on one entry form, not separately.
- First-time entrants must complete the reverse side of the form, in as much detail as possible. Please fill in a separate copy of this for each first-time applicant or each applicant who hasn't completed a Challenge in three years.
- Correspondence and event details will be sent by email. If you are not able to receive emails please contact the coordinators who will arrange for the information to be posted to you.
- Dogs are not allowed on the Challenge.
- The Challenge is a non-competitive walking event. Routes involving running will not be accepted.
- Organisers reserve the right to reject any application without giving a reason.
- Entries will only be accepted on the application form printed in *The Great Outdoors* magazine (original or copy). Digital subscribers and overseas entrants may contact the coordinators (at tgoc@newtonmorehostel.co.uk) to confirm purchase of a digital edition and will then be sent a copy of the form.
- Forms must bear the original signatures of all group members: unsigned forms will not be accepted.
- All members of your team should be competent backpackers capable of continuing independently if other team members have to retire.
- All Challengers participate at their own risk, in accordance with the spirit of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, which states: "There is a longstanding legal principle called 'volenti non fit injuria' which means that a person taking access will generally be held to have accepted any obvious risks or risks which are inherent in the activities they are undertaking."

 By signing the application form you agree to abide by the rules, conditions and spirit of the Challenge, as summarised here, and accept the inherent risk of mountain walking. We might offer you advice on your route, but you should rely solely on your own wits and judgement of the terrain. *The Great Outdoors* magazine, the event's organisers and sponsors accept no liability for any damage, loss or injury, illness or mishap which might arise from your participation in the event, however caused, other than that caused as a result of *The Great Outdoors* magazine's negligence. You are strongly advised to check your own personal accident insurance.
- To apply for the 2016 Challenge, please make your payment via the TGO shop at **shop.kelsey.co.uk/product/TGOCHALLENGE**. You will be given an account code to quote on your form. Complete the form and send it (in full, not cut) to Sue Oxley and Ali Ogden, **TGOC Coordinators, Newtonmore Hostel, Main Street, Newtonmore, PH20 1DA**, to arrive by Monday 31 October 2015 at the latest. Forms received after that date will not be accepted. Those who do not have internet access to make a payment may send a cheque for £50, payable to Kelsey Publishing Ltd, along with their form. It is not necessary to send a stamped reply envelope.
- Receipt of entries will be acknowledged by email. Please allow at last 14 days for acknowledgement before contacting the Coordinators.
- Once you are accepted, the entry fee is non-returnable. Fees for those unlucky in the draw for places (if there is one) will be returned.

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Notes

The Draw: If the Challenge is over-subscribed, a draw for places will be made after the closing date. All applicants will be advised soon after that draw whether their application has been successful. We try to ensure that no-one is unlucky two years running.

Exemptions: The following are exempt from the draw: those on a 10th, 20th or 30th crossing and walking partners (WPs); those who took part in the first Challenge in 1980 and WPs; and vetters and WPs. If you applied unsuccessfully for the 2015 Challenge and did not subsequently regain a place via the Standby List, we will do our best to get you on the 2016 event. Those who completed their 10th or 20th crossing in 2015 will, along with their WPs, automatically be entered into the Standby List draw, should one be necessary.

Standby List: Each year people inevitably have to withdraw from the event before May. A Standby List, itself subject to a draw, to determine positions, allows us to offer places to those unsuccessful in the November draw. In most years, up to 30 people have regained places from this list, though there can be no guarantee. Positions will be advised if requested. The Standby List will close on Friday 31 March 2016, after which no more places will be offered. This will be strictly adhered to.

Backcountry Challenge: The Challenge is intended as a true test – a sustained, self-sufficient backpacking event through wild country – for everyone taking part. Back-up support of any kind is strongly discouraged. While the choice of accommodation used is yours, the focus is intended to be on self-supported camping and we strongly recommend, for safety reasons, that all participants carry a suitable shelter.

Experience: The Challenge demands competence in navigation, survival techniques, camp and hill craft, and common sense. It should not be your first experience of backpacking. The event's camaraderie is renowned and fellow Challengers are always willing to help in any way they can.

It's Not a Race! The event is non-competitive with neither prizes nor kudos for fast crossings; eight days should be the minimum allowed, and that for a straightforward low-level crossing. Most people take between 12 and 14 days. Fast routes involving what we consider to be an undue element of risk will not be accepted.

Any Questions? Contact the Coordinators via **tgoc@newtonmorehostel.co.uk** or call **01540 673360 / 673583**. You'll also find a lively message board on the Challenge website at **www.tgomagazine.co.uk/challenge**, where other Challengers are always happy to chat and advise.

Join us in May for what should be a terrific event – take up the Challenge!

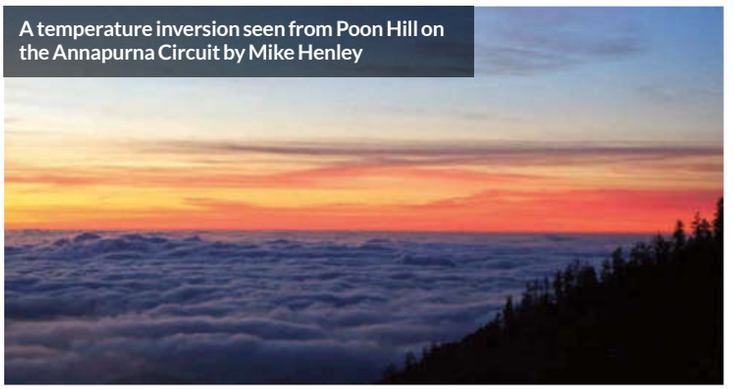
The Great Outdoors Challenge is a cross-Scotland backpacking event, held every year since 1980. Sponsored by The Great Outdoors Magazine, it is supported by Hanwag in association with Fjällräven.

Readers' photos



'Infinity'

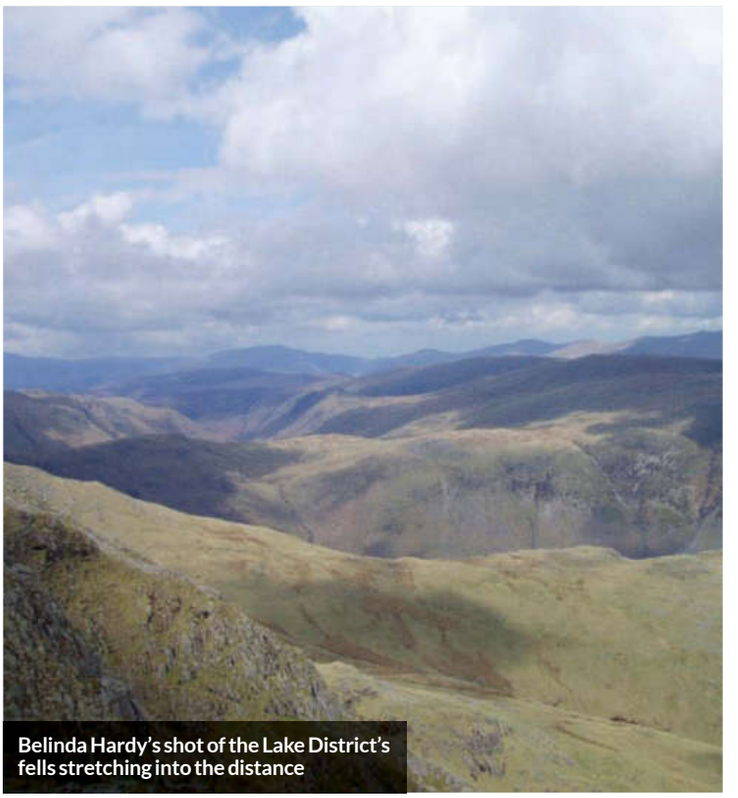
Chris Bowness took this shot of his friend Robert Brown during a whiteout on Beinn Udlamain



A temperature inversion seen from Poon Hill on the Annapurna Circuit by Mike Henley



Infinity from Buachaille Etive Mòr by Calum Cossar



Belinda Hardy's shot of the Lake District's fells stretching into the distance

In our readers' photography series, we ask you to send in your best pictures on a specific theme. Next is 'First snow' by 22 October then 'winter wildlife' by 19 November.

Send your pics to editorial@tgomagazine.co.uk
or The Editor, The Great Outdoors, Kelsey Publishing, Cudham Tithe Barn, Berry's Hill, Cudham, Kent, TN16 3AG

Next month: **'First snow'**

See more readers' photos online at tgomagazine.co.uk



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Our G-1000 fabric can be adapted with *Greenland Wax* to suit different weather conditions and activities.

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Using an iron, hairdryer or camp stove, heat the garment until the wax is absorbed. To remove it, wash the garment at 40°C.

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